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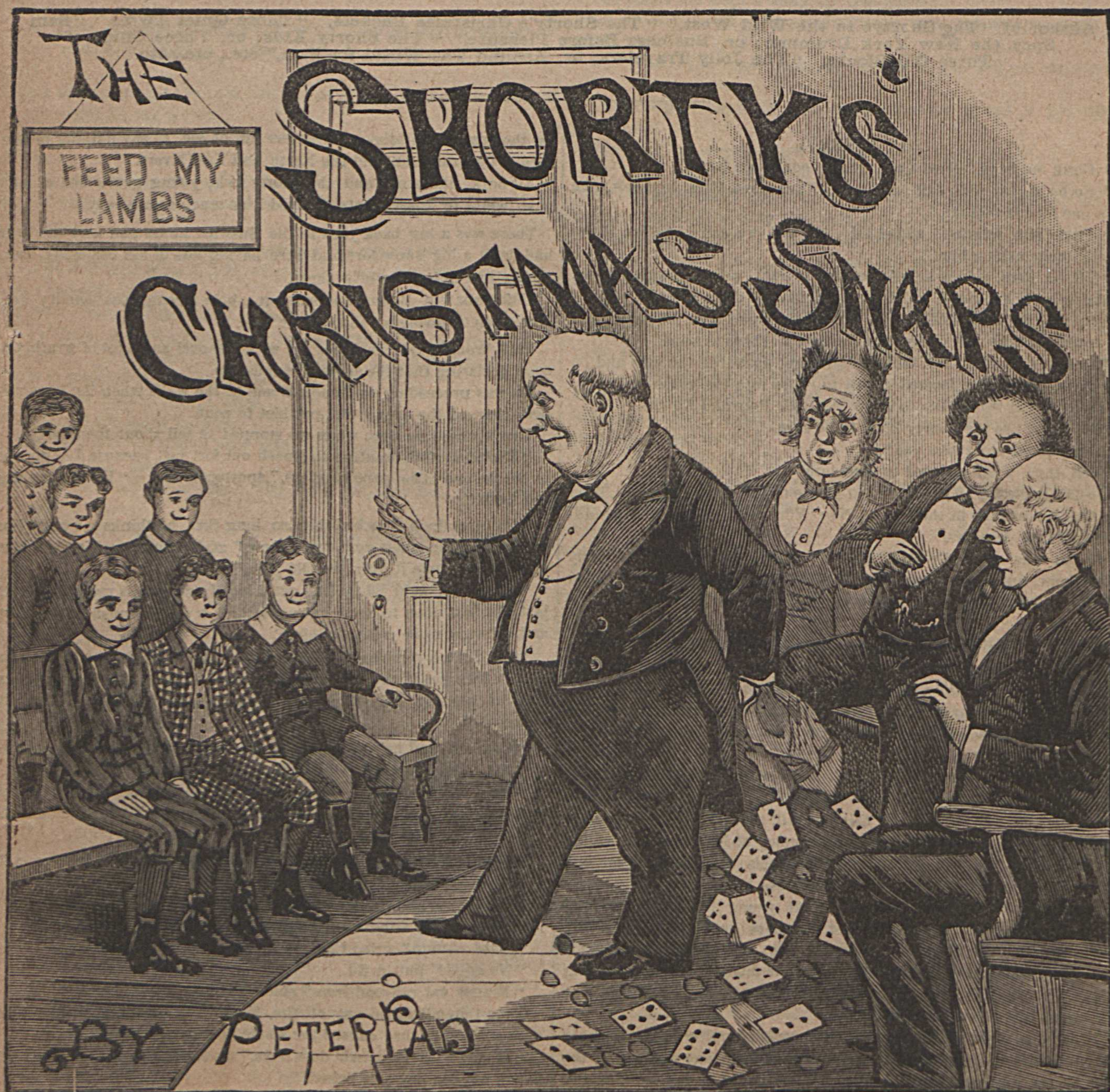
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THE SHORTYS' CHRISTMAS SNAPS.

By PETER PAD,

Author of "The Shortys in the Wild West," "The Shorty's Christmas Rackets," "Those Quiet 'Fwms," "Sam Spry, the New York Drummer; or, Business Before Pleasure," "The Shorty Kids; or, Three Chips of Three Old Blocks," "The Jolly Travelers; or, Around The Wosld for Fun," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"COME on, boys," cried Cal; "that coon is too fresh."

"So he is, but we'll salt him down," answered Pete. "Let's give him one for his mother."

"Paste him, fellows!" added Ed. "Guess we can have fun if we like without asking him."

"Hi, hi, dere, yo' boys, jes' you stop o' dat!" yelled Ginger Jones, dodging a big snow-ball which little Cal had let drive at him.

Pete and Ed were bombarding him at the same time, however, and he could not very well dodge the shots of all three at once.

The result was that Mr. Ginger Jones got pasted in the eyes and on the nose, and finally deemed it best to retire into the house.

Perhaps you would like to know who Cal, Pete and Ed are.

Why, they are the Shorty kids, to be sure.

Doesn't that enlighten you?

Well, then, I will proceed to elucidate.

Josiah Burwick, an eccentric old gentleman of sixty odd years, lived on Madison avenue in the City of New York with his son and grandson and their families.

Josiah was generally called the Old Man, his son George, a lively little runt, not more than four feet and a half high, being called Shorty, while George's son, Charles, also a sawed-off, was known as the Kid.

When the three Shortys got tired of knocking about the world the Old Man and George had married again, while Charlie tried on wedded life for the first time, and rather seemed to like it.

In the natural course of events three little strangers arrived at the Burwick mansion at about the same time, and finally came to be known as the Shorty Kids.

Cal, or California, to spell it out, was Josiah's son, and a bigger lump of mischief it would be hard to find.

I always have thought, and I think so still that Shorty had a grudge against me when he named that rascally boy of his Peter Pad, called Pete for Short, for the young ruffian reflects no credit on me and bones me for a dollar or two every time I see him.

Charlie's son was named Ed, after that young friend of mine who writes so called funny sketches for the BOYS OF NEW YORK, but I guess the Kid felt sorry afterward for the elder Ed never gives his young namesake anything, unless it is the measles or the whooping cough for which he has a great fondness himself, having had the former no less than three times.

Well, now to get on with our story, merely stopping to remark that Ginger Jones is a colored gentleman of uncertain age who serves the Old Man in the capacity of butler, footman, valet and general utility man.

It was getting on toward Christmas and there was plenty of snow

on the ground, and the gutters were full of ice, to say nothing of the lake in Central Park, and the North and East rivers.

All boys like snow, and the Shorty kids, young gentlemen of half-past twelve or thereabouts, enjoyed it as much as anybody.

There was a big back yard to the Burwick house and here the boys had built a big snow fort and were having lots of fun besieging, capturing and defending it by turns.

Unfortunately, Master Cal had put a hole through the laundry window when throwing a snow-ball at Pete.

That brought Ginger Jones out with a shovel and a lot of wrath, the coon declaring that the snow fort must go.

He was proceeding to demolish one of the walls when the boys rallied, charged the enemy and put him to rout.

That's where we were when we stopped to tell about the Shortys.

"The idea of his wanting to smash our fort just because I happened to break one little pane of glass," sputtered Cal. "He always was too fresh."

"Oh, grandpop has had him so long that he thinks he owns him and us and the house and everything," added Pete. "He can't boss us if he can come it over the Old Man."

"Come on," said Ed, "let's get a lot of snow-balls ready. It'll be just like that coon to come out again and try and smash up the fort, and we want to be ready for him."

"Oh, I'll tell you what," chuckled Cal, and he laughed as he thought of it, "let's get in the fort and hide, and keep as still as mummies, and by and by old Ginge will think we have gone out on the street——"

"Yes, yes, and he'll come out here to bust up the fort, and——"

"Get busted himself. Won't that be a dandy snap?"

"Hold on," said Ed. "We'd better go out on the street first, and make a lot of noise, so that he'll hear us, and think we have dusted."

"Well?" said Cal and Pete.

"Then we'll come back here on the quiet, and lay for that coon."

"Good enough. Come on, boys."

In the house and up-stairs went the three boys with a rush and a hurrah, meeting Ginger on the drawing-room floor.

"Yah! chump!" cried Cal.

"No good!" put in Ed.

"Nigger eat railroad iron," added Pete.

Then they all sailed out at the front door, banging it after them with a violence that cased the whole house to shake.

"H'm! I git squar wid dem boys," muttered Ginger. "I tell deir faders an' den dey gets licked!"

That didn't seem very satisfactory, however, and the coon gave his woolly head a shake.

"Dat don' do me no good. I do suffin' else, jes' ter show dem dat dey kean't bodder dis chile de way dey does."

"H'm! dey say Chris'mus am a time fo' rejicin'! I don't see much to rejice ober when de house am full of noisy boys, pesterin' de life out'n yo'. Jes' like ter keep dem boys at school de yeah roun', dat's wha' I would."

Suddenly a new idea came into Ginger's head.

"Bress my heart! Why didn't I fink ob dat befo'? Dere am dat snow fort. Dem boys dey plays dere all de aftahnoon, runnin' in an' out an' trackin' in de snow froo de house an' lettin' in de col' air an' givin' eberybody a col' in de head."

"I fix dat yer fo't, see if I don't! When dey go out dere in de ya' agin dey won' fin' so much ob dat snow fo't lef' as would cober a chicken. Yo' jes' leabe it to me, sah."

Then Ginger Jones went down stairs, but on a big fur cap and a pair of mittens, took a shovel and sallied out into the yard.

The Shorty Kids were there before him.

They knew that he would be doing something of this kind, particularly as he supposed them to be out on the street.

They were behind the walls of the fort waiting for him.

Each of them had a big pile of snow balls in front of him, ready to soak that coon.

Ginger came out, saw the place apparently deserted, and chuckled.

"H'm! reckon dey gets a 'sprise when dey comes back," he remarked.

He did not know that the cook had let the boys in at the basement door, promising to say nothing.

Ginger advanced and thrust his shovel into one of the snowy battlements.

Three boys suddenly sprang up and let him have it.

His big cap was sent flying, and both ears were filled with snow at the first go-off.

That did not finish the business, however, by a good deal.

The boys had their arms full of ammunition, and they could fire as fast as a repeating rifle.

The second volley took Ginger in the mouth and eyes and on the top of the head, the snow-balls breaking and spattering all over him.

"Hi, dere! Stop o' dat!" he yelled, falling back a pace or two.

The boys kept up the fire, however.

Then Ginger tried to charge them.

They proved too many for him.

He couldn't begin to dodge their shots, and they fired a fresh volley every three or four seconds.

They wouldn't fall back, either, and then, too, they had the snow fort to dodge behind.

They didn't need that, for they were acting on the defensive now.

Poor Ginger suddenly discovered that he had helped himself to a good deal more than he could conveniently get away with.

In more classic language, he had bitten off more than he could chew.

Then he beat a hasty retreat.

"Follow him up, boys," cried little Cal. "He'll lock us out here if we ain't spry."

The three youths jumped over the walls and chased the enemy up, making things warm for him.

That coon was hit in the back of the neck by a big overgrown snow-ball, which spread all over and ran down between his shirt and his back in a jiffy.

Another took him in the top of the head and made him feel as if he had butted an iceberg.

He got into the house in the liveliest time he had ever made, the boys following right on top of him.

There was no chance to lock them out as he had thought of doing, and he had to hustle to get clear of them.

"Yah! you big coon," chuckled Cal, as Ginger retreated to the pantry.

"You will break down our fort, eh? I guess not."

"If you haven't got enough we'll give you more to-morrow," added Pete. "Come on, boys. He's scared to come out."

Then those little cherubs went up to their rooms to dress for dinner and show their fathers what nice boys they were.

Old Mr. Burwick came in just then, and went to the library, where he proceeded to toast his shins before Shorty and the Kid came in.

"Dear me, here's another Christmas almost here," he muttered, "and the whole house will be in an uproar, I suppose, with those boys."

If he could have seen those boys five minutes before he would have thought that his predictions were forestalled.

"If it wasn't for the other boys Cal would be quiet enough," resumed Josiah, "but Peter and Ed just spoil him."

The Old Man would never admit that his boy could be just as mischievous as other boys, but such was the simple fact.

Indeed, Cal often gave the other boys points, and would as soon work up a racket upon his own father as upon any one else.

"Yes, Christmas is upon us," observed the Old Man, "and now the question is, what shall we do to make it pass off pleasantly?"

"Hallo, pop, what yer thinking about?" cried a cheery voice, and in walked Josiah's son, George, better known as Shorty.

"Ah, George, good-evening. I was thinking of what we would do to celebrate Christmas."

"Oh, we'll have some sort of a jolly racket, pop."

"Yes, yes, we'll be jolly, of course; but can't you be more definite—can't you give me an idea, an——"

"You mean you want a snap, do you, pop?"

"Snap! No, indeed! You and Charlie have too many snaps. I want an idea."

"Well, can't you raise one, pop? Haven't run out of 'em, have you?"

"I want a particular one, you must understand, and if you can suggest——"

"You want me to give you a good snap, don't you, pop?"

"No, sir; I don't want any of your snaps."

"Der Ole Man hasn't got over der last one we played on him, hey, pop?" said the Kid, entering the room at that moment.

"I don't want snaps. I want ideas," sputtered Josiah.

"Dey're der same thing, pop. You can't get up a snap unless you have an idea."

"Well, I'm not getting up a snap, if you mean a practical joke by that term."

"Oh, ain't you, pop?" asked the Kid, innocently.

"No, I want to know how to——"

At that moment Ginger entered, looking very solemn.

"Ge'man to see yo', sah," he said, addressing Mr. Burwick and ignoring Shorty and the Kid.

"Did you get his card, Ginger?"

"No, sah, but he say he am de boss ob de Sunday school whar Marse Cal and de oder boys go."

"Ah, indeed, Mr. Slocum, is it? Show him in, Ginger. Don't go, boys," as Shorty and the Kid were about to rise.

Presently a tall, partly bald, serious looking man in a black frock coat and white choker, came into the room, bowing stiffly to the Old Man.

"Good-day, Mr. Burwick, hope I am not interrupting you, if so I will——"

"No, no, don't go," cried Josiah. "These are my two sons, or rather my son and grandson, Mr. George Burwick, Mr. Charles Burwick, Mr. Slocum, superintendent of the Sunday-school which our boys attend."

"Glad to see you. Shake," said Shorty.

The Old Man frowned, but Shorty was full of mischief and could not be kept down so easily.

"Wish I was a kid again, myself," he said, "so I could go to your ranch. Must be a bully place."

"I trust that I make it attractive," said Mr. Slocum with a sickly smile.

He wasn't fully onto Shorty, and did not wish to offend Old Man Burwick by neglecting his son.

"Der boys seem to like it fust rate, don't dey?" continued Shorty.

"I trust, sir, that the moral impetus given them at our school begets a sincere love for the place," said the superintendent seriously.

"Of course, to say nothing of the lib'ry books and the picture cards and candy at der holidays," answered the irreverent Shorty.

"I used to be a mighty good Sunday school boy myself," put in the Kid, "when it got to be Christmas or time for der picnics and anniversaries."

"Ahem, these are not the only attractions of the place," observed Slocum, scarcely knowing what to think of the two little runts.

"Did you have any particular business with me?" asked Mr. Burwick, coming to the poor man's assistance.

"Yes, I had. Knowing how great an interest you took in our school and in the progress of your son and grandsons, and knowing also how much the children all think of you, Mr. Burwick, I have called to ask you to address the school upon the occasion of our Christmas festival, to be held on Christmas Eve."

"Certainly," said the Old Man, greatly tickled. "I would be pleased to speak to them upon the follies of youth and how to avoid them."

"Nice old duffer he is to point out snags and rocks," mused Shorty. "Well, if der Kid and me don't get a bully snap out o' this, I'm off my beat."

"That will do very nicely, Mr. Burwick," said the solemn Slocum, "and I know that whatever you may say will be listened to with the greatest attention."

"H'm! I shall certainly try to interest the children," muttered the Old Man, turning as red as an auctioneer's flag.

Thanking Mr. Burwick for his kindness, Mr. Slocum then took his departure, the Old Man renewing his promise to be present and say something to interest the boys and girls of the Sunday school.

"I am ashamed of you, boys," he said, when Slocum had sloped. "The man will think you are heathens."

"Oh, he knows what der kids go to der school fur, pop," laughed Charlie. "It's for the good things they can scoop in."

"It is not. My boy has vastly improved since he began going."

"Well, he needs it, pop," was the reply, which pleased the Old Man as little as the former.

"And you're going to speak to der kids, dad?" interposed Shorty.

"Certainly."

"When does it come off?"

"To morrow night, Christmas Eve."

Shorty and the Kid traded grins unobserved by the Old Man.

Those grins meant that the two jokers were up to a snap of the finest brand, gilt-edged and put up in a separate wrapper, right side up.

CHAPTER II.

THE Sunday-school room was bright with lights, gay with festoons of evergreens and holly, merry with the voices of two or three hundred boys and girls and just overflowing with good feeling.

It was the night before Christmas and the youngsters were having a picnic.

There was to be singing and recitations and tableaux and speeches and presents, of course, and the girls and boys were wild with anticipation.

The girls had on their gayest frocks, the boys wore their Sunday best, with bright, fresh ribbons at their throats, and all hands were just too happy to sit still.

On a broad platform at one end of the room sat the solemn Mr. Slocum all in black with a white choker, but even his sober presence could not keep the girls from giggling or the boys from tittering as some funny remark was whispered.

Two or three sober-sided old deacons with tufts of white hair standing up above a wilderness of bald heads, an ancient female or two in black silk, lots of lace and nodding feathers, and the parson himself were seated on the platform beside the superintendent.

Presently Mr. Burwick, in full evening dress, with a diamond in his expansive shirt front and a big watch chain dangling across his fat stomach, entered the room.

"There's pop," piped up little Cal, who sat on the front bench.

Everybody giggled, of course, that is, all the youngsters, though the old ones frowned.

"Sh!" observed the old women, fanning themselves violently.

"Step right up here, Mr. Burwick," said the funereal Slocum, advancing a pace or two.

"H'm! They didn't ask your pops to come!" said Cal, in a hoarse whisper to Ed and Pete, who sat one on either side of him.

"No, dad would be putting up snaps on 'em," whispered Pete.

"So would my pop, you bet," added Ed, and all the youngsters grinned again.

"Sh!" said the old woman once more, while the deacons wriggled and turned away their heads so that no one might see them smile.

The Old Man went upon the platform, shook hands with Slocum and the deacons, bowed to the two old girls and gave his flipper to the minister to shake.

Then he sat down and glared at Cal so that that fresh young gentleman might not make any more irrelevant observations.

Presently Shorty and the Kid came in and took seats among the crowd below the platform.

"H'm! they won't let your pops sit on the stage," whispered Cal to Pete, in a tone of triumph.

"He wouldn't be seen sitting there with all those old jays," answered Pete, irreverently.

Shorty heard the remark and grinned, the Old Man frowned, Slocum looked sadder than ever, the old ladies coughed and the deacons suddenly wanted to sneeze, for they buried their faces in their handkerchiefs.

Then Slocum got up, tapped a bell and nodded to the organist as a sign to let her go.

The children sang one or two choruses, there were the usual recitations from the little tot of four, the nervous small boy of six in a big collar and squeaky shoes, and from the good young man of nineteen with a new suit and a rose in his coat.

Then there came more singing, Christmas carols and the like, another recitation or two and then an address by the super.

It was getting pretty warm by this time, for the room was crowded, but of course no one thought to shut the registers or open the ventilators.

"Mr. Josiah Burwick will now say a few words to the school upon a timely topic," said Mr. Slocum.

The Old Man arose, came to the front, bowed, smiled expansively, and said:

"It is a great pleasure, my dear young friends, to be able to meet so many of you on this joyous occasion, and to see you all looking so happy."

"Dey wouldn't look so if dey didn't expect to get something," remarked Shorty to the Kid.

"Hush up, pop. Give de Ole Man a chance. You couldn't speak so putty as dat, bet yer life."

"Youth is the time of sunshine," went on the Old Man, "but we must not forget that by and by we shall meet storms and wreck and danger, that the sky will be overcast, and that dangers will beset our paths."

"Guess pop must have been reading up for dat speech," observed the Kid.

"Close yer flytrap, young feller," admonished Shorty, "and let yer granddad have der floor."

The Old Man continued in this flowery strain for a few minutes, and then proceeded to point a moral.

"I have alluded, my young friends," he continued, "to the rocks in our way, and to the thorns that lie in our path, and will now point them out to you."

"Smoking cigarettes, playing hookey, pitching pennies and playing cards are some of the evils which you must avoid in order to be good boys and grow up to be good men."

"How I blush when I see boys of ten and twelve smoking cigarettes or chewing tobacco! Don't do it, my young friends, don't do it, if you want to be gentlemen."

The Old Man was getting pretty hot by this time, but he wasn't half through yet.

"Beware of playing cards," he cried, feeling in the tail pocket of his dress coat for his big handkerchief, "and above all, don't gamble or play for money, not even for buttons or beans or chips, for they but whet the appetite for worse things."

"You may begin by playing a harmless little game of cards for buttons," went on Josiah, finding his wipe and tugging at it, "and before you know it you will be putting up pennies, and then nickels, and then quarters, and finally risk your dollars, rob your employers, get into — My gracious!"

No wonder the Old Man suddenly stopped and looked alarmed.

The children were all howling with mirth and pointing to something behind him.

Josiah turned and looked.

Great guns!

When he had yanked that big handkerchief out of his pocket he had also brought out something else.

A pack of cards, a handful of red, white and blue disks, known to the initiated as chips, and half a dozen dice and a shaker.

The cards were scattered over the platform, the chips rolled around the Old Man's feet, and the dice went bounding toward the front.

Those were nice things to show to the kids, weren't they?

And wasn't this an appropriate time to exhibit them, too?

Slocum looked as dismal as three funerals, and held up his long hands in horror.

The old girls shrieked and hid behind their fans, too much astonished to move.

The minister opened his eyes, jumped up and looked unutterable things.

The deacons first coughed, then giggled, and then stooped as if to examine the strange articles on the floor.

The children shrieked and tittered and laughed and considered it no end of a good joke.

As for the Old Man, he was just completely broke up.

Where was his moral lesson now with those things dropping out of his pocket?

What could he do? what could he say to get out of the scrape?

"Ahem! Silence!" said Slocum to the school.

"Ahem! Haven't you come to the wrong place by mistake, Mr. Burwick?" said the parson, in an awful tone.

What could the Old Man say?

How did those things get in his pocket, anyhow?

He looked over to where George and Charlie sat, hoping to get an idea from them.

They both were looking as solemn as owls, never even winking.

Suddenly a bright idea popped into Josiah's head.

He was averse to lying, upon general principles, but in this case the end seemed to justify the means.

"Ah, excuse me," he said, with a broad smile, as he stooped and began to gather up the cards. "I had forgotten. I had proposed to give a little exhibition in sleight-of-hand, later in the evening. These are some of the things I had intended to use in performing my different tricks."

What a whopper!

"Ahem, silence!" said Slocum, as the youngsters began to whisper.

"The school will please sing," said the parson. "Deacon Broadaxe, will you assist Mr. Burwick to pick up his apparatus?"

Of course this was a quiet intimation that Josiah was not wanted any longer.

He took it just as it was given—quietly.

While the youngsters were singing he slid out, leaving the deacons to pick up the offending articles.

He hurried to the ante-room, got his hat, coat and rubbers and went away, feeling both mad and cheap.

"I'll bet anything that George and Charlie put those things in my pocket!" he snarled as he hurried out to find his carriage. "This is one of their snaps, I suppose!"

So it was, sure enough, but the Old Man couldn't prove it.

He reached home very mad, and Ginger, who let him in, nearly had his head taken off.

"Ain't yo' home early, sah?" inquired that coon.

"Early!" snapped Josiah. "No, I'm late! Ought to have been home an hour ago, ought never to have gone to that confounded place at all. Stand out of the way, you blockhead, and get me my dressing gown and slippers."

"Did de missis come wif yo' in de car'ge, sah?" asked the astonished coon.

"No, I guess not. She must have stayed to see the rest of the show."

"Shall I sen' Mike back aftah her an' de oder ladies, sah?"

"Yes—no—oh, go to blazes and don't bother me," and Josiah dounced into the library as mad as they make 'em.

Ginger sent the carriage back after the ladies and children, and then went to look after his master.

"The idea of making a fool of me before that whole crowd," Josiah was sputtering, as he stood before the fire, having thrown his overcoat and hat upon a big easy chair.

"Wha' say, sah?" asked Ginger, who entered at that moment.

"It almost wants to make a man want to go away and live in the woods," continued the Old Man, paying no attention to Ginger.

"He don't take dis chile, if he go off like dat," thought Ginger. "De city am good 'nuff fo' dis ge'man."

"Shan't be able to look them in the face again," growled Josiah.

"The idea! Cards and chips and dice, and in my pocket, too! Oh, this is outrageous!"

"Guess de gubnor mus' be out'n his head," mused Ginger.

"The idea of a respectable citizen, a church member and the father of a family, being subjected to such an outrage! I won't stand it!"

He suddenly started away from the fire at such a rapid pace that he ran slap into Ginger, who had not been expecting any such move.

The darky was upset, and Josiah himself tumbled into the big chair, making an opera hat of his dicer in a twinkling.

"What do you mean by upsetting me in that manner, you black blockhead?" roared the irascible Mr. Burwick. "Can't you see where you are going?"

"Didn' upset yo' 't all, sah," answered Ginger, sitting on the carpet.

"Don't talk back to me, sir. You must have upset me. Do you suppose I would sit on my own hat on purpose," growled Josiah, getting up.

"How come dis ge'man to be settin' on de cyarpet, sah, ef I upso' youse? 'Pears to me like as if I was de one what was upso'."

"Don't sit there, chattering like a parrot. Get up here and take off my boots and give me my slippers."

Josiah was mad clean through, and Ginger knew from past experiences that it was no use to argue with the Old Man when he was in such a state.

Nothing could satisfy him, and Ginger received more abuse in five minutes than he had in six months.

First he hurt the old gentleman's corns in getting off his boots; then his slippers had not been properly warmed and the right one went on the left foot, then he gave him a twist in putting on his jacket, and so on.

Josiah growled and grumbled at everything, and the poor coon was glad enough when he was relieved, and the Old Man was seated in his big chair in front of the fire, smoking a huge pipe.

"'Clar fo' it," muttered Ginger, as he left the room, "ef dat ole man get many turns like dis one I wouldn't stay wif him a minute. He 'm wuss dan a settin' hen when he get dat way. It am a good ting dat it don' las' long."

CHAPTER III.

THE Old Man was asleep in his chair in front of the cheerful fire when Shorty and the Kid softly entered the library, an hour afterwards.

Josiah had quieted down after his late explosion, and was now snoring peacefully in his chair without a thought of the recent annoyance he had suffered.

"Get onto der sleeping beauty," whispered Shorty.

"Wouldn't think to look at him now dat he had just been doing the horrible example act for the kids, would you?" chuckled Charlie, softly.

"Sh! Don't wake der baby," said Shorty, in a whisper. "Let's fix him up putty before der girls come home."

"Right you are, pop. How'll we do it?"

"Santa Claus snap, sonny. You come with me."

The two little runts went off, up garret, where Shorty's old time minstrel costumes were stored away in several big trunks.

"Say, pop, I've got a better snap dan der Santa Claus one," said the Kid.

"Give it to us."

"Tramp."

"What? Reg'lar bum?"

"Tomato can, bundle in a handkercher and all, pop."

"Scare der whole house?"

"And get dat old snoozer der grand bounce."

"And Ginge a scolding fur being so careless."

"Dat's the snap, popsy."

"Come on."

The Old Man was still snoring, with his head on his breast, when the two jokers returned.

A daub of red paint on his nose, a big smut on each cheek, a lot of black on his eyebrows, and a shock wig of red hair on his bald head made the Old Man another person.

A stick, an old bundle tied up in a ragged handkerchief, together with a tomato can and a few crusts of bread, placed at his feet, helped to carry on the deception.

"Dassen't put on another coat, do we, pop?" asked Charlie.

"Nixey," returned George; "but jest hold on a minute."

A piece of an old blue checked jumper deftly tucked under the Old Man's waistcoat and concealing his shirt, still further helped on the transformation.

It didn't look like the Old Man sleeping there at all, but rather some old bum who had sneaked into the house and was now taking his comfort.

A decanter and a half-emptied glass, placed upon the table just behind him, completed the preparations.

Then Shorty and the Kid stood and took in the show, softly chuckling to themselves.

Presently there was the sound of carriage wheels, the voice of the coachman calling to the horses and then the sound of footsteps coming up the stoop and of many voices.

"Cheese it! Here comes der girls and der kids. Let's mope!"

"Dis way, pop! We'll get nabbed if we go out front."

The two little rascals slipped out at the back door and up the rear stairs to the flight above.

Then the door opened, and three women and as many boys were heard talking all at once.

"I think it's a shame the way those men go on," said Josiah's wife.

"You don't know whether they did it or not, Angie," said Shorty's wife.

"No, ma, of course not," put in the Kid's wife, "but Angie is always accusing them."

"Now, Caddie Burwick, you know just as well as I do that George and Charlie are always up to mischief."

"There ain't any flies on pop, and if he gets up a snap it's sure to be a daisy."

"Peter, I'm ashamed to hear you talk like that."

"Oh, yes, ma, you'll scold him before me, but by and by you'll laugh at it and right to his face."

"Well, it was a dandy snap, anyhow, ma. Didn't pop get red when the chips flew out?"

"California, go to your room!"

"He's the worst boy in the house. Ed's getting spoiled by him."

"It isn't so. Ed puts him up to all sorts of tricks."

"Say, ma, you ought to have seen the job that Cal put up on Ginger this afternoon."

"There, I told you so. I knew Eddie was led into mischief."

"Well, it's a shame, anyhow!"

"The boys catch it from their fathers. Josiah doesn't teach little Cal to play tricks."

"No—you bet he can give the Old Man points, ma!" piped up Pete.

"Not another word, sir! Go to bed this minute."

"Yah! got sent to bed, tell-tale!" chuckled Cal.

"California, go to bed."

"Yes, ma, but can't I kiss pop good-night first?"

"The dear boy!" laughed Mrs. George and Mrs. Charlie, scornfully.

"Wants to kiss his papa good night!"

"It would be a good thing if your boys were as well brought up," snapped Mrs. Josiah.

Cal went on through the hall and into the library, where presently a startled shriek was heard.

"Fire!" gasped Angie.

"He's fallen in a fit!" cried Kate.

"Murder! Thieves!" screamed Caddie.

Then the three women and two boys rushed to the library just as Cal was running out.

"What's the matter?"

"Is the house on fire?"

"Send for a policeman!"

"Ginger! Mike! Katey! Norah! George! Charlie! somebody! everybody! anybody! help!"

"What's all dis fuss about?" asked Shorty, coming down in slippers and smoking-jacket.

"Oh, dear! there's a tramp in the library, and he's been drinking papa's wine."

"A tramp! Oh-oh, wee-ee-ee!" shrieked all the women at once.

Then Ginger, the coachman, the cook, the laundress, the up-stairs girl and the boys all dashed into the library.

What they saw was a red-headed, unshaven tramp, dozing off a drunk in front of the fire.

"He has killed my papa!" yelled Cal, kicking the supposed tramp in the shins.

Then Ginger prodded him in the stomach with a bootjack and made him grunt.

The cook gave him a belt over the head with a broom, and that caused him to jump up.

Then Michael, the new coachman, lathered him across the legs with his whip and set him to dancing the liveliest kind of a jig.

"Don't let him escape, the wretch!"

"Search him and see how many spoons he has stolen."

"Go and call a policeman, Mike."

"How did he get in here, anyhow, I'd like to know?"

"It's that lazy Ginger, of course! I wonder you keep such a good-for-nothing fellow."

"Hello! Hold on, stop!" yelled the tramp.

He was pretty wide awake now, and realized that he was in a peck of trouble.

The cook plied her broom, the coachman lashed his whip, while Ginger ran full tilt at the intruder and butted him full in the stomach.

Down went the tramp, and at the same time his red hair fell off, his blue jumper disappeared and there sat Josiah Burwick looking very mad and very much surprised, in the middle of the floor, with all his assailants around him.

"What is the meaning of this attack! Can't I take a nap in my own house without being assaulted?"

"Why, it's Josiah!"

"Blessed if it ain't der Ole Man!"

"Why, papa, is this you?"

"Of course it's me! Who else do you suppose it would be, hey?"

"We thought it was a tramp!"

"I catch on now," said Cal. "Pop wanted to play Santa Claus and take us all by surprise."

"Oh, what a surprise!" sang Shorty.

"Nice looking old Santa Claus, he'd make!" sneered the Kid. "Dat's der wust fake of a masquerade I ever did see."

"Santa Claus don't carry a can, pop."

"And he don't carry his wardrobe in a handkercher either, grand-pop!"

"What a sell!"

"If you can't do any better than that, Josiah, I wouldn't advise you to attempt it again," said Angie. "Just look at yourself."

Josiah did just look at himself in a big mirror over the mantelpiece, and the image he saw therein made him madder than ever.

"I don't understand—who has played this—oh, if this fooling doesn't stop, I shall—"

"Too thin, pop! You shouldn't have gone to sleep."

"Fine old Santa Claus you are! Why, if the Italians caught you, they'd put you in the bag."

"The idea of an old man like you dressing up like that," said Angie. "I'm ashamed of you, Mr. Burwick."

"And making an exhibition of himself before all those children! I shall be ashamed to go to that church again."

"Setting them an example, indeed! We won't dare to meet Mr. Slocum after all this."

"But I tell you it was a trick—a snap, as the boys say," cried the Old Man.

The crowd wouldn't have it.

They one and all believed Josiah guilty.

Not only did they accuse him of dressing up like a tramp to deceive them, but also of putting those cards et cetera in his own pockets for the sake of creating a sensation.

It didn't matter what he said, it only made things worse.

He tried to explain, but nobody would listen to him.

"Yes, it looks like me, doesn't it?" he snarled, "to get myself up in this style, just so that all hands could club me, doesn't it?"

"You never was very good at getting up snaps, you know, pop," said the Kid. "Why didn't you ask us? We could have helped you fust-rate."

"I've had enough of your snaps," growled Josiah. "Clear out of here, all of you. I want to think."

"Think up another snap, pop," asked Shorty. "Why, you can't fool us, so what's der use of trying?"

"No! I don't want to think up another snap!" howled that mad Old Man. "I want to discover who invented this one first."

"Better look in the glass again, pop."

Then they all went out, the women, the children, the servants, and all.

Josiah stood before the fire with his hands behind his back, doing a heavy lot of thinking, when in came Shorty and the Kid again, looking very serious.

"Get onto the old duffer's nose, Kid. Must have taken a lot of stuff to get it that color."

"Yes, and he hasn't shaved in a week. Must have been powdered to-night."

"I'd like to powder you fellows," growled Josiah. "Powder and lead are just what you need."

"H'm, pop, if you took dat face o' yours down town, der boys would shoot at it for a target."

"I'd think your face would ache, grandpop, it's so terrible."

"See if yer ticker ain't stopped, Kiddy. I'll bet a hat it is."

"What do you fellows mean by making me out such a fool?" demanded Josiah, angrily.

"Couldn't do what's already done, pop, could we?"

"Try to work off that old tramp snap, hey? You did dat last Christmas."

"Scare the life out of all the women folks, too! Aren't ye 'shamed?"

"Oh, you naughty old duffer," said the Kid. "Tra-la, pop. I'll meet you in the washroom."

Then those jokers lighted out, and never offered a word of explanation for their outrageous conduct.

"Of course they played both jokes on me," mused the Old Man. "There isn't any one else who would do it."

The worst of it was, however, that he could not prove it on the Shortys, for the boys were fond of playing larks as well as their fathers, and everything was game that came into their lots.

"Cal wouldn't do such a thing, of course," he mused, "and if I thought either Peter or Ed did it I'd warn their jackets for them in a way they would not like."

Having come to this conclusion the Old Man decided to go to bed and sleep on it, and perhaps think up some nice little snap to work off upon his son and grandson in return for the annoyance they had caused him.

So little Cal would not play any rackets on his dear old father, wouldn't he?

Perhaps not!

There was a young fellow sneaking along the upper hall just at that time, however, who bore a striking resemblance to Master Cal both in form and face, and if it wasn't he I am sure I don't know who it could be.

Josiah came up-stairs in his slippers, reached the landing and turned down the corridor leading to his room.

If he had looked down, he might have seen a stout string strung across his path at a height of six or eight inches, but he didn't.

He didn't see it, but he felt it all the same.

He was shuffling along at a pretty good gait, when all at once he his caught one of his big feet in it, and went flying forward.

He tried to save himself but was unsuccessful, and landed right on his nose.

I would not like to repeat what he said just then, as it might shock polite ears, but it was good, strong Anglo-Saxon language, and meant business.

"What the deuce is that?" he muttered, getting up and feeling along the floor.

As the obstruction was now behind him, and as he kept right on, it need not be considered remarkable that the Old Man failed to find it.

"A ball, or a skate, or something belonging to one of the boys, I suppose," he growled. "I do wish they wouldn't be so careless."

Just then he felt something moist fall upon his outstretched hand.

It was blood, and it came from his nose, which was not used to such whacks.

"Lucky I didn't break my neck as well!" he growled, as he went on.

"Goodness me, Josiah!" cried his wife, when he entered his room, "haven't you washed that paint off your face yet?"

"Ain't any paint on my face," growled the Old Man.

"Well, I guess I can see! Haven't I got eyes? What do you want to contradict me in that foolish fashion for, Mr. Burwick?"

"I tell you it ain't paint, it's——"

"Why, I can see it! Do you think I'm blind? You're getting more and more obstinate every day."

"Tain't paint at all. It's blood!" yelled Josiah, speaking in a hurry, so that Angie could not break in upon him again.

"Blood!" shrieked Mrs. Josiah. "For heaven's sake what have you been doing now? Can't we leave you alone for a minute without your getting into trouble?"

"Give it up!" growled Josiah, going into the bath-room.

Oh, no! Cal wouldn't play any little jokes upon his poor dear old father, not he.

The little rascal was chuckling just outside the door and, a few minutes later, when he had removed the barricade, he went off to Pete's room and told the latter all about the little snap on the Old Man.

"Won't we have a daisy time to-morrow?" he continued.

"You just bet we will. We'll just paint this old house red."

"Yes, and if that sneaky coon says anything to pop about it, we'll pitch him into the snow and bury him."

"Oh, he's all right. We fixed him to-day. Good-night. If you wake first call me. Tra-la-la and a Merry Christmas."

"Oh, you're too previous. Christmas isn't here yet. Wait till it comes."

"And then look out for larks."

"And snaps."

"You bet."

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS DAY was ushered in by the blowing of horns, ringing of bells, firing of cannon and the screaming of all the steam tugs in the river or Sound within five miles of the city.

It was all very well for a good old Dutch city like New York to thus celebrate the coming of Saint Nicholas, but there were some people in the city who could not appreciate this sort of business.

It was very unreasonable, of course, to grumble at being wakened out of a quiet sleep at five o'clock on a cold winter morning, but there were many who did.

Among the lot was our old friend Josiah Burwick, Esq.

"Blow those whistles," he grumbled, "shoot those cannon, the deuce take those bells!"

Consequently the whistles went on blowing, and the deuce must indeed have got into the bells, for they rang like mad.

"Why can't people observe the day in a sensible fashion and not go to making all this hullabaloo over it? If I thought any of our boys were out helping to raise this infernal racket, I'd take all their presents away from 'em and give 'em to the poor."

"Christmas only comes once a year you must remember, my dear," said his wife, soothingly.

"Once a year, eh? Well, that's too often for people to make jack-asses of themselves."

"Maybe it will stop pretty soon."

So it did, and Josiah dropped off to sleep.

It was only to be awakened again an hour or so later, however, by a tremendous tooting of tin horns right under his bedroom windows.

Daylight had arrived, and with it all the horns in the city apparently.

"Great Scott! this is awful!" howled Josiah. "If I had a gun I'd shoot those infernal wretches!"

"Oh! they'll go away in a minute."

They didn't, all the same.

In fact, they were some chums of the Shorty Kids, and they meant to keep the thing up until the boys had joined them.

There were a dozen or twenty of them, and they all had horns which they blew for all they knew how.

Short horns, long horns, crumpled horns, bass horns, tenor horns, tin trumpets and imitation cornets, all going at once.

Talk about discords!

Wagner himself could never have conceived such a frightful uproar, even in his wildest dreams.

The Old Man stood it for five minutes and then got very mad.

"Oh, they'll go away in a minute, will they?" he sneered. "If I only had a few bombs they'd go away now."

The racket continued and at last up jumped Josiah, ran to the window, shoved it up and stuck out his head.

He wore a big flannel nightcap with a tassel on the end of it and a ruffled night-shirt full of frills and tucks, for he was a toney old duck and always liked to put on style.

"Get away from here, you young vagabonds!" he yelled down at the gang of boys.

"Hallo, boys, here's Santa Claus," cried somebody. "Wish you a Merry Christmas."

"Go away, I tell you, or I'll send for a policeman."

"Oh, go walk on yourself!" yelled the boys.

"Josiah Burwick, come in out of that window?" screamed Angie.

"Do you want to catch your death?"

Josiah couldn't hear anything but the horns.

He shook his fist at the boys, and yelled something at them which they did not catch.

They answered something that the Old Man did catch, however.

It was a volley of snow-balls, and he caught it right in the neck.

He was altogether too tempting a shot for the boys to resist.

They let him have it fast and furious.

One snow-ball took him in the ear, and made him think that a swarm of bees had gone in there, while another dropped right down inside his fancy night-shirt.

He didn't seem to care about saying anything more to the boys after that.

He hauled in his head, slammed the window down, and began to make remarks warm enough to melt all the snow in the city in ten minutes.

"Josiah," said his wife, sharply.

"Well, I guess you'd say something if you got a snowball in your ear," sputtered the Old Man.

"What made you put your head out, then? You ought to have known better."

That wasn't very comforting, and Josiah tumbled into bed in a very unpleasant frame of mind.

The boys had evidently thought that some one would be out after them in consequence of their bombardment of the Old Man, and so had lighted out, the sound of the horns growing more and more distant.

If the racket had been kept up, it is quite likely that Josiah would have gone frantic; but as it had now subsided, he managed to catch another nap before breakfast.

The Shorty kids were too old nowadays to hang up their stockings, or to take much stock in Santa Claus, but, all the same, they expected presents on Christmas Day, and if a belief in the old saint had been necessary in order to obtain them, they would have sworn by him as religiously as any tot in slips or kilts.

The gifts were generally presented at the breakfast table, or as soon as the meal was dispatched, and then the boys had the rest of the day, until dinner time, to themselves.

The Shorty family was a jolly lot, take them all together, and there was always plenty of fun to be had at Christmas.

The presents ranged in value from a penny whistle to a diamond bracelet, and everybody got something. Ginger Jones and the servants included.

There was a lot of fun when the presents were given out, and the Hollidays, next door, would have imagined that the entire Burwick family had gone mad if they had not remembered what day it was.

Shorty got a nigger doll, the Kid was given a rattle, the Old Man received a new pack of cards to take the place of those he had

chucked around in the Sunday school, and Ginger Jones got a box of pink powder for the complexion.

Mrs. Josiah received a bat and ball, Mrs. George was given a gold snuff box and Mrs. Charlie was paralyzed with a set of store teeth, though her own were as sound as rocks.

These were the comical presents, but there were plenty of substantial and very welcome ones, and all hands were made as happy as ever old Santa Claus intended people to be.

The day was clear and cold, the air strong and bracing, and there was no more excuse for being cross or grumpy than there was for expecting a sunstroke.

The boys took their skates and went off to the park for an hour or two of exhilarating sport, the women sitting down to gossip or look after the dinner, while Shorty and the Kid went out to see their friends.

It was about a half hour after Shorty had gone out, and the Old Man was sitting in his library looking over the papers, when Ginger came in, and said:

"Dere's a po' little ol' tramp down at do', sah, what says he knowed yo' when yo' was po' as hese'f, an' he wants to know if yo' kean't give him sumpin' fo' he Chris'mus."

"A tramp, did you say, Ginger?"

"Yas'r, a po' little ol' man, 'bout sixty-five year old, I reckon."

A sudden thought came into Josiah's head.

He imagined that he scented another snap.

Those boys weren't going to fool him if he knew it.

The tramp was Shorty in disguise beyond a doubt.

Who else would have invented a story such as the tramp told?

Nobody of course.

Oh, the Old Man was fly and no mistake.

At least he considered himself so.

"I'll fix Mr. George," he mused, as a smile overspread his expansive countenance.

Meanwhile the coon stood awaiting his master's orders.

"Bring him up here, Ginger," said Josiah, with a benevolent smile.

"Up heah, sah!" said the astonished moke.

"Certainly. I said so, didn't I?"

"Yas'r."

"Very well then, do as I say."

"But he am bery dirty, sir."

"That's all right. We'll give him a bath."

"He do need it, sah, shuah 'nuff."

"Yes; and, Ginger?"

"Yas'r."

"Bring up a bowl of hot soup and some coffee and bread, and be sure you have it hot."

Then the Old Man winked, and Ginger tumbled.

"Oh, I'll hab it hot, sah, you bet."

"That's right, it must be hot."

Then the coon went away, and Josiah smiled again.

"I haven't forgotten that little joke that George played on me last year," he chuckled, "and now I'll pay him off in his own coin."

Then he went to his desk, took out a box of cigars, and then began hunting in the pigeon-holes for something.

"Where are those squibs that I took away from Cal a few weeks ago? The young rascal would have blown the house up if I hadn't confiscated them. Pete and Ed put him up to it, of course. Ah! here they are!"

The Old Man took some powder out of the crackers, made a hole in a cigar with a penknife, and carefully inserted a good-sized thimbleful of the explosive, securing the wrapper afterward with a little gum.

Then he put away the box, and left the cigar on the table where he could lay his hand on it when he wanted it.

He had just finished his preparations when Ginger came in with the tramp.

He was just about the size of the Old Man, was partly bald, with a fringe of gray hair all around, and had only half a dozen yellow teeth.

He was dirty, sure enough, as Ginger had remarked, his boots being sadly broken, his coat being secured with clothes-pins, and his ragged trousers fastened about his waist by an old rope.

He wore an old plug hat, which Adam might have discarded, and as for linen, he was as guiltless of it as any Hottentot.

His beard had not seen a razor for a month, and he had a bad eye

which twinkled and danced as it rested on the many evidences of comfort and luxury all about.

"Sit down, my man," said Josiah, pointing to a chair. "I would like to ask you a few questions. Ginger, you may bring the soup."

"Reckon dat tramp be in de soup 'fo' de Ole Man get froo wid him," chuckled the coon as he went down-stairs.

"So you used to know me when I was as poor as you are, did you?" asked Mr. Burwick, when the aged wayfarer had seated himself.

"Yes, sir, oh, yes, to be course," said the tramp, in a husky voice, probably the result of drinking too much corn juice.

"Ha! got his voice disguised pretty well," thought the Old Man, "but I know him, all the same. I'll pretend to believe everything he says."

"Yes, sir, I knowed you thirty-five years ago, but I don't suppose you remember me," the tramp went on.

"Ah, yes, I don't believe I do. You met me in California, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's the place. 'Frisco, wasn't it?"

"No, I think it was back in the mountains."

"To be course it was. Remember it as well as if it was yesterday."

"Yes, yes, to be sure, and so do I. Let me see, your name is Silas Thornton, isn't it?"

"Well, well, now just look at that!" cried the tramp. "Who'd ha' thought you'd remember it?"

"Yes, and you owned one of the biggest rolling mills in the country."

"Ho—ho—ho! You remember that, too, do you? Well, well, ain't it strange?"

"Oh, yes, and your smelting works turned out more stuff than any within a hundred miles."

"That's so, they did, for a fact."

"And that saw mill of yours, that could grind out a lot of timber, couldn't it, when it liked?"

"Yes! Whole acres of it."

"And that canning factory, too. Why, what a lot of stuff it did put up?"

"Enough to flood the market, boss. Ah, them were happy days."

"You were worth two or three millions then, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes, easy."

"And often lent me a dollar when I was hard up?"

"I suppose I must have, old pard."

"What a lot of lies I am making him tell," mused Josiah. "I never knew anybody by the name of Silas Thornton, in California or anywhere else. I never had to borrow a cent of any one. Saw mill, smelting works, rolling mill, canning factory and all that in the backwoods! Well, I guess so."

Just then Ginger came in, bearing a tray containing a bowl of steaming hot soup, a cup of red hot coffee and a plate of sandwiches.

"I suppose you won't refuse to take a little lunch with me?" said Josiah, as Ginger put down the tray.

"Well, no, seeing you're so kind. I've had my breakfast, of course, but I don't mind taking a bite with an old friend. Gay old times in California, wasn't they, old pard?"

"Yes, yes, to be sure. Help yourself, Mr. Hornblower."

"Thankee, sir, you're very kind," and the tramp collared onto a sandwich and took half of it at a bite.

"H'm! forgets his own name," chuckled Josiah to himself. "Called him Thornton at first. I've got you now, Mr. Shorty."

Ginger was smiling to himself, for he had worked up a little racket of his own on those sandwiches.

There was enough mustard in them to scald the mouth of a stone image, and the tramp's grimaces showed that he had been bitten.

He said nothing, but took a big swallow of coffee to drown the bite of the mustard.

The coffee was hot enough to melt an iron cup, and our tramp thought it must have been brewed in the infernal regions.

He finished his sandwich and took another, this time to cool off the coffee.

The second sandwich was full of red pepper and made the bum fairly gasp.

He grabbed up the soup and gulped down half a pint at a swallow, so as to cool his throat.

The soup was even hotter than the rest of the breakfast, and Mr. Thornton or Hornblower began to shed tears.

"'Scuse me crying, pard," he said, in faltering tones, "but it always makes me blubber when an old friend does me a kindness. Thanks, old pal, I don't think I'll eat any more. I ate more breakfast than I thought I had. You'll 'scuse me, won't you?"

"Certainly," said Josiah, with a broad smile. "Would you like a smoke?"

"Don't care if I do, boss."

Josiah grinned as he passed that loaded cigar to the tramp.

"We've about cooked his insides, and now we'll blow him up," he observed to himself.

Oh, he was going to get square with Shorty this time for a dead certainty.

The ex-Californian took the cigar, bit off the end, lighted it, and began puffing away most contentedly.

"Not quite so good as the ones you used to smoke, eh, Mr. Greenwood?" asked Josiah.

"Not quite, but they're fair."

"You used to pay a dollar apiece for them, I believe, Mr. Howard?"

"Somethin' like that."

"I'll catch him in a second," thought the old man. "I've called him four or five different names, and he answers to all of them. I'll call him the right one soon."

The tramp continued to puff, Josiah and Ginger looking on very much interested.

"You lost your money speculating, I suppose, Mr. Spoopendyke?"

"Oh, yes, that is——"

Puff!

Bang!

Away went that cigar as though it had been struck by a buzz saw.

Not even the butt remained in the tramp's mouth.

His hair and eyebrows were singed, the end of his red nose was full of powder, and several fiery particles got between his coat and his skin.

"Pretty good cigar, isn't it, Mr. Shorty?" chuckled the Old Man.

"Reckon this is one on you, ain't it?"

"Yah-yah-yah! dat am de bes' snap ob de season!" roared Ginger, doubling up with mirth.

The tramp did not seem to think it was so funny.

First, he gave Ginger Jones a kick in the shins that sent that coon to the floor in a hurry.

Then he kicked the Old Man's chair over and sent Josiah sprawling upon the carpet.

"Mighty funny, ain't it?" he growled.

"Why, yes, George; you must admit——"

"My name ain't George, nor Shorty, nor Spoopendyke, nor Howard, nor Greenwood, nor Hornblower, nor Silas Thornton, and I never was in Californy in my life, and never saw you before and don't want to see you again."

The Old Man began to tumble.

"Nice way to treat a fellow on Christmas, ain't it? Burn his insides out with pepper and mustard and hot soup, and then try to blow his head off with a loaded cigar. Take that, you bald-headed old sucker!"

Then Josiah got a crack in the jaw that knocked his false teeth out and made him think that he had run afoul of a mule's hind leg.

Ginger got a paste in the ear as he was getting up and another kick in the shins, and that mad little old tramp bolted.

The next that Josiah saw of him he was hoofing it down the avenue as fast as he could go, while Ginger and the servants were standing at the basement door yelling for the policemen on the next corner.

"H'm! got sold that time," grunted the Old Man. "I mustn't let George or Charlie know anything about this. If they find it out I will never hear the last of it."

CHAPTER V.

"CHOLLIE, me boy, let's give the Old Man a surprise," said Shorty to the kid, as both were strolling along Broadway, bundled up to their eyes and with their hands deep in their overcoat pockets.

"Right you are, pop, but what'll it be?"

"Let's send him something for his Christmas."

"Ton o' coal?"

"Naw!"

"Load o' wood?"

"Nixey."

"Bar'l o' flour?"

"Oh, go take a vacation."

"Well, what will we send him then?"

"A monkey. Don't you want to go?"

"No, I'm engaged, pop. You'd better send yourself."

"Let's send him a tree."

"Christmas tree, pop?"

"That's the kind."

"All hunky."

Then they posted off to the first store where such things were kept, and selected the biggest tree that could be found.

This they ordered to be sent to the Old Man, to be paid for upon delivery.

The storekeeper knew Shorty very well and did not hesitate, therefore, to send the tree without first receiving the price thereof.

"Send it right away, Mr. Spruce," said Shorty, "'cause der Ole Man wants to trim it at once and give der boys a surprise party when dey come in."

"Very well, Mr. Burwick, I will have it sent as soon as the boy comes in."

"What boy is it?" asked the Kid.

"Why, the boy that works here."

"Der regular one?"

"Yes."

"It ain't a telegraph boy, is it?"

"Oh, no."

"Den dat's all right. If it was a messenger boy der Ole Man wouldn't get it soon enough."

"Don't say nothing about der telegraph boys," put in Shorty. "Dey're faster dan the elevated railroad, anyhow."

The Old Man had just recovered from the little racket with the tramp whom he had taken for Shorty in disguise, when he concluded to go out for a stroll and see what was going on in the gay city.

He put on his coat and a high dicer, took his gold-headed cane and big gloves and started off, feeling at peace with all the world, not expecting tramps.

The spell of calm content which hung about him was soon rudely broken.

As he stepped out of the door his hat was suddenly knocked off, and he felt something harsh and cold, and redolent of the piney woods scraping against his face.

He jumped back and saw a big Christmas tree coming up the stoop, evidently propelled by its own volition, as he could see no other motive power.

On the top branch of the tree was his own high silk dicer, waving gracefully in the breeze.

The tree came right on, and Josiah would have been enveloped in its green and fragrant branches if he had not beat a retreat for the second time.

"Hold up, where are you going? What are you bringing that tree here for?" he yelled.

He could not see any one but he presumed that somebody must be there, as trees do not often use their feet for pedestrianary purposes.

Then the tree stood still and a voice came out thereof saying:

"This is Mr. Josiah Burwick's, ain't it, Mister?"

"Yes, but we don't want any Christmas trees if it is."

Then the man carrying the tree appeared from behind it, presented a bill to Mr. Burwick and said:

"One tree, three-fifty, collect at the door."

"I don't want it," snapped Josiah.

"But you ordered it and I was told to collect it."

If this was the boy that the man in the store had spoken of, he was

a pretty old one, for he weighed nearly two hundred pounds and wore a full red beard.

"Well, I like your cheek! Knock my hat off and scratch my face with your old tree and then want me to pay for it."

The "boy" reached up, took down the Old Man's hat, put it on the place intended for it, and said, gently but firmly:

"I've brought that tree all the way here, and I ain't a-going to take it back. There's three cases and a half to collect on it, and I'm going to collect. See!"

The Old Man saw, and without the aid of his eyeglasses.

The boy was more than a head and shoulders taller than he was, weighed considerably more, and had fists like boxing gloves.

"Who sent the tree?" asked Josiah, somewhat more mildly than at first.

"My boss, Mr. Spruce, on the avner, and you ordered it, and said it was to be paid for at the house."

"I never did anything of the kind."

"Ain't you Mr. Burwick? Of course you are. I can see it on the door."

"Yes, I am Mr. Burwick."

"Well, then, the tree was ordered by Mr. Burwick, and Mr. Burwick expects to pay for it. See?"

The Old Man did see.

He wasn't big enough to throw the fellow off the stoop, and he had never met any one quite so determined.

There was the tag on the tree, directed all right, and the Old Man began to think, possibly on account of the man's determined air, that he really ought to pay for it.

"Well, well, bring it in and set it in the back parlor," he growled, "and I'll settle."

The boy put the tree where Josiah showed him, received his money, and then said:

"Say, pop, can't you give a boy something for his Christmas?"

"A boy! Fine looking boy, you are, I should say."

"Thank ye, pop. I are pretty healthy looking, that's a fact," said the boy, with great complacency.

"How long have you been a boy, for goodness' sake?"

"'Bout two years. Before that I was a hand, and before that again I was a rat."

"Gracious me! What a strange transformation! When do you expect to be a man?"

"Been a man once, but didn't like it. Too much work and too little pay. Going to be a boss some day, and then I'll do nothing and get big pay for it. That's the cheese, pop."

"The cheese?"

"Yare. But don't keep me here all day, pop. Give us something for my Christmas, won't you?"

"H'm! How much do boys generally expect?"

"You might make it a dollar, pop. Rich, good-looking, nice old gents like you generally gives me that much, and you wouldn't do less than them. See?"

The Old Man did see, and the piastre was quickly forthcoming.

"Tra-la-la, pop. Meet you at the skating-rink," said this fresh young boy, as he departed.

"Well, of all the cheeky fellows I ever saw, this one takes the prize. Calls me pop and talks about skating-rinks. Alluded to my bald head, I suppose. Well, now I've got the tree, what am I going to do with it? Chuck it out in the back yard, I suppose, and let the cats roost in it."

Not much!

At that very minute the three ladies of the household came upon the scene.

They had observed the tree coming up, and had now come to look at it.

Then they all had something to say about it.

"Oh, you dear, splendid old man! How kind of you to think of it!"

"Won't the boys be delighted! They haven't had a tree of their own for ever so long."

"So clever of you to get it while they were out. We'll trim it, and not let them know anything about it till this evening."

What could the Old Man say after all this?

Nothing, of course.

The ladies had all given him such a dandy reputation for benevolence and goodness, and all that sort of business, that it would never do to tell them what he had purposed doing with the tree.

"H'm! that'll cost a lot more," he mentally growled. "Trimnings and candles and sugar plums, and all such nonsense! I'll bet that George and Charlie did this, the rascals!"

However, there was no help for it now, as the women folks were full of the project.

They closed the folding-doors, and then went off to think over the great scheme.

Shorty and the Kid, feeling sure that their old dad would be coerced into taking the tree, concluded that they might as well do something themselves after that.

"It's the first tree the kids have had for a good many years," said Shorty, "and I guess dey ain't too old for such things yet, Kiddy. Let's you and me get der fixings for it, and do der thing up in good shape."

"Don't care if I do, dad," said the good-natured little runt, and the fixings were sent home in good time for the women to put in place.

Meanwhile, the Old Man concluded that he might as well take that walk which the advent of the Christmas tree had interrupted.

He started out again, and this time he met with no mishap.

That is, not immediately.

As it happened, he arrived at a cigar store where he was wont to purchase his favorite brand of cigars, just at the time when Shorty and the Kid, having finished their purchases, were starting for home.

They were coming out of a hotel when they saw the Old Man enter the cigar shop a few doors below.

Shorty yanked the Kid back into the hotel so quick that the little fellow thought he must have been struck.

"Cheese it, Chawles, there's pop."

"Well, I saw him, dad. Did you want to snap my head off?"

"Naw, but it's a snap on der guv'nor. Wait here a minute."

Then Shorty danced back to the desk, asked to borrow the telephone for a few moments and got to work.

Just at this time the Old Man was exchanging the compliments of the season with the cigar man.

"Ah, Mr. Burwick, good-morning. Merry Christmas. Beautiful day, isn't it? Lovely weather?"

"Thank you, Mr. Weed. Same to you. Delightful weather indeed. Let me have half a dozen of my——"

Ting-a-ling! Tingalingaling!

The telephone in the rear was begining to kick up a terrible fuss just then.

"Excuse me a moment, Mr. Burwick. Pick out what you want."

The tobacconist chucked a dozen cigars on top of the case and posted off to the telephone.

Tingalingalingting!

"Yes, yes! Hello! Yes, this is Mr. Weed's. What's that? Fire? What the Dickens do I care—— What?"

The Old Man was selecting his cigars at this time.

"You don't say!" cried Weed to the telephone.

One can tell a telephone it lies, by the way, with the greatest impunity.

"The deuce you say! Why, he's in here now."

Josiah was proceeding to light a cigar, having put four or five in his pocket.

"Big one, is it? Well, I will tell him. I say, Mr. Burwick, did you know that your house was on fire, and that they don't expect to be able to save it?"

The Old Man nearly jumped out of his gaiters.

"What's that? My house on fire?" he yelled.

"Yes, a friend of mine has just been there and——"

Josiah did not stop to hear the rest.

The pedestrians on Broadway saw a fat little old man come suddenly flying out of a cigar store and go bolting up the street at the maddest sort of pace.

It was Josiah going to the fire.

"There he goes!" cried Shorty, as he came running to the hotel entrance. "Ain't he hoofing it, Kiddy?"

"Yes, but what's der matter?"

Just then the Old Man ran into a tall, thin individual and sent him sprawling.

"Thinks there's a fire at home," chuckled Shorty.

Then he briefly told of the gag he had put up on the old gentleman.

"Knowned Weed had a telephone in his place and thought I'd give pop a snap. Ain't he agoing?"

"Beats any go-as-you-please match I ever saw."

Josiah had bolted off without paying for his cigars, and in his hurry he had rammed his big cane through a window as well.

That made Weed mad, and he ran out and began to yell after the fugitive.

That gave some smart fellows an idea.

"Stop thief!" they yelled, giving chase at once.

That is always sufficient to raise a commotion.

As much so as yelling fire in a crowded theater.

In ten seconds there were seventy-five people chasing after the Old Man.

In ten seconds more there were ninety-nine men and boys, fourteen women and three dogs in chase.

And how that old codger did hoof it!

He had no time to look back, and not very much to look ahead.

The consequence was that he was nearly run down by a hack.

And came within one of falling under a car.

And upset three little children and a nurse.

And tripped up a cop with his big stick.

Likewise he nearly threw himself down by the same means.

He did not lose much time, however, in spite of all these mishaps.

There was a first-class commotion on the street, and no denying.

A Texas steer on the rampage could not have caused more of a sensation.

Coppers, stragglers, boys, dogs and loafers, all joined in the chase.

The Old Man distanced the whole field.

There wasn't anybody in the crowd that could get near him.

The way his short, fat legs flew over the ground was a lesson to idlers.

A jumping-jack, going by steam, could not have moved faster.

Down one of the cross streets went the Old Man till he reached Madison avenue.

Then he turned the corner so suddenly that he ran into a man, nearly as fat as himself, and both sat down heavily upon the walk.

"Excuse me," panted Josiah, when he could get his breath. "Can't stop now, the house is on fire."

Then he jumped up and dashed on just as the crowd turned the corner.

They took the fat man for Mr. Burwick, and jumped on him at once.

"We've got him! We've got him! Where's the police?"

"Search him, and see what he's stolen. Ain't he a villain!"

"What do you mean, you loafer?" cried the fat man, laying about him with his cane.

Then the coppers came up, and took him in, despite his protests.

He proved his innocence at the station-house, but of that we have nothing to do.

When Josiah reached his residence there was no more sign of a fire than there were of strawberries in the snow banks.

He looked up and then he looked down, but still he saw no fire.

No fire engines, no smoke, no crowd, no excitement, no nothing.

He ran up the stoop, tugged at the bell as if he meant to dislocate it, and then let himself in with his latch-key.

He met Ginger in the hall, looking very much excited, and at once demanded:

"Is this my house?"

"Yas'r, it am. What am de mattah?"

"Have they put the fire out?"

"No, sah, dar am a good fire in de fu'nace, an' anoder in de lib'ry, and one in de kitchen."

"But where is the fire, you black idiot? Isn't the house on fire?"

"Deah me, no, sah. Couldn' fink ob such a ting."

Josiah was nearly beat out, and puffed like a porpoise.

He sat down on a chair next to the hat-rack, puffed and blowed for a few moments, and then gasped:

"Ain't there been any fire here at all, no engines nor anything?"

"No, sah," said the coon, beginning to doubt his master's sanity.

"Well, they told me there was, and, of course, I believed it. If I thought that this was one of George's or Charlie's snaps, as they call 'em, I'd disinherit 'em both, but of course it can't be. They didn't know anything about it."

All the same, the Old Man never dreamed how near he had come to the truth.

CHAPTER VI.

"I SAY, boys, this is the nicest spot on the whole lake. Aren't you glad we struck it?"

"It is, boss, for a fact. The ice has not been touched, and is as smooth and hard as marble."

"Let me show you some fancy strokes, fellows. You can't do nothing on that chopped-up ice at the other end."

The Shorty Kids were out skating.

Cal had found a dandy piece of ice, about an acre in extent, in the middle of the lake, and the boys were just going to have the best kind of a time imaginable.

Presently up comes a big gray-coated cop, and says in a fine limburger accent—for all New York policemen are not Irish, you know—says he:

"You don'd could skade on dot ice, you loafer boys."

"Yes, we can," replies that good little boy Cal. "Just watch us and we'll show you how well we can do it."

Thereupon that little monkey proceeded to write his name on the ice in the most approved Spencerian style, upper strokes light, down strokes shaded.

"Nein, I didn't meant dot you don'd know how to skade once. Dot was all ride, aber you couldn't skade here."

"Why, yes, we can," said Pete. "You just look," and away he glided into the Dutch roll.

"Py shimminies! you poys vas trive me grazzy once. I told you more as dree dimes dot you don'd got some right to skade on dis blace. Dot was resairved for der glub."

"What club?"

"Dot Ny Yorick Cherman Carnivalischen Verein, dot gostume glub mit skaders what was going to gif der fancy ball mit der ice dis aef-dernoon und wear all dem putty glodes."

"Oh, I'm onto you now, Dutchy," said Ed, cutting a pigeon-wing on the ice.

"You vas onto me once? Nein; you vas onto dot resairved ice dot I tolt you more as fife dimes to get off dot already."

"No, I mean I stand under you, don't you know?"

"Ya, I know dot. You vas a leedle feller und I vas a pig mans. Off gourse you stood under me."

"Ah, he means that he tumbles, Sauerkraut," put in Peter.

"Vell, you don'd could dumble on dot ice once. Off you vant to dumble, shust you run away und dumble someveres else, don'd it."

The copper was big and so was his club, and as the boys did not care about being run in or thumped, they reluctantly left that glassy bit of ice.

They were as fully equal to putting up snaps, however, as their elders, and it wasn't long before they found a way to get around that Dutch copper.

"Oh, I say, it's a shame that three little fellows like us can't enjoy a good thing when we find it," sputtered Cal.

"We couldn't hurt his old ice," returned Pete, "and it's all cut up and mushy and crowded to death everywhere else."

"Come with me, boys, I've got a snap," cried Ed, and away he skated toward the bank.

Here there were several danger signs thrown in a heap together for future use.

These consisted, in each case, of a flat board to slide over the ice, an upright, braced, and a sign board painted white with "Danger" on it in big, fat, black letters.

"Let's take one of these fellows apiece, shove 'em over the ice and fence in our skating pond," suggested Ed.

No sooner observed than accomplished.

Away went the three little rascals, each pushing one of the signs before him.

When they reached the smooth ice the sign boards were placed at the proper distances, so as to face the more crowded parts of the lake, and inclosed a considerable space.

Big heads, those boys had.

Now they could skate in peace.

Several people saw them and started to join them, seeing that the ice was so good.

The minute they came near those danger signs, however, they skated away like mad.

No broken ice, wet clothes, and colds in the head for them, if you please.

A few timid parties, seeing the boys and the signs, got very much scared.

"They can't know that it is so dangerous," they argued. "Somebody ought to warn them."

What is somebody's business is usually nobody's, and nobody gave them warning.

The boys were having the dandiest kind of a time, and were enjoying to the utmost the exhilarating sport, when along came that Dutch policeman again.

"My shiminy Gritzmas! off dere vasn't dose poys skading mit dat Cherman Society ice!" he gasped. "Dot 'Merigan poy vas got some more sheek as a mool. I fix dem ride away soon, I bet you."

Then he marched off toward those boys with wrath in his bosom and a big club in his first.

He saw the danger signs but that did not deter him.

"Dot was poorty good," he muttered, "und I leafe dem oob. Dot geebs der rest off der growd away maybe, und I don'd got so much drubbles maging dot ice glear for dot fancy ball once."

If he thought he was going to catch those boys, however, he reckoned without his landlord.

They spotted him just as he passed the outposts.

"Cheese it, fellows," cried Cal. "Here comes Germany after us."

"I don't think I want to skate any more," observed Pete. "Suppose we let him have his old ice."

"Wait a second," said Ed, "and I'll show you some fun."

Then he skated off, got the furthest danger sign and began shoving it across the ice, skating for all he was worth.

Cal and Pete were watching him, keeping out of the way of the angry copper, however.

"Gom ride away von dot ice," shouted the Dutchman. "How many dimes vas I had to told you dot already? Off you gives me some more foolishness I runs you in once."

"Ponny!" yelled Ed, in true New York boy dialect, for I never heard the word anywhere else but in the Metropolis and its environs.

The cop didn't ponny for a cent.

In fact he did not see the squall coming until it was too late.

Ed gave the thing a good start and then left it to its own resources.

The ice here was as smooth as glass, and the sign went scurrying along before a favoring gale at the rate of ten knots a minute.

The copper turned to run, but did not get out of the way soon enough.

Biff!

The lower board took him in the heels and the sign whacked him on the head.

Away he went, skating on all fours like a great ungainly cat.

"He said he was a pig man," chuckled Cal, "and now he looks like it."

"As independent as a pig on ice," remarked Pete with a grin.

The poor copper's troubles were not over yet by a good deal.

The danger sign had to tumble over next, and he and it were very much mixed up.

When he managed to untangle himself he had a swelled nose, his hands were numbed, and he was mad as a hornet.

The boys were still on the smooth ice laughing at his misfortunes, and that made him mad again.

"Py shimineddy! I proke mein glub mit dose poys' heads once off I cotch dem," he remarked as he shook his fist at the three rascals.

He was altogether too previous.

When he shook his fist he stepped on a spot of glare ice, destroyed

his balance and sat down so suddenly that his gray helmet was left suspended in air where his head had been.

"Ach! I dink my back was proke!" he grunted.

Then the boys skated past him as he sat on the ice, and each had something to say.

"Good-bye, Dutchy, I'll meet you at the fancy ball."

"Much obliged for letting us have the ice, Saurkraut. Awfully kind in you, dear boy."

"Put on skates, Good-looking, and we'll race you. See you later."

Then the three torments went away, and were presently lost in the crowd of skaters.

By the time the Dutch cop got back, they had disappeared, having gone into the shelter house to take off their skates and warm their hands.

"What'll we do next?" asked Pete, when they had cleaned and bagged their skates and were leaving the house.

"Go home and have fun with the coon," remarked Cal.

"Let's walk," suggested Ed, "and we may pick up some fun on the way."

"That was a dandy snap on the copper, wasn't it?" said Pete.

"Tip-top; and we had better skating than if we had stayed with the crowd."

"Well, let's skate now."

Leaving the park they walked down Fifth avenue, which was alive with elegant turnouts, just swarming with pretty girls out for a walk, and merry with boys and misses out for a lark.

The three boys knew lots of other boys, and many were the merry greetings as they walked down the avenue, now and again catching a ride on a fast going sleigh, and occasionally snowballing a coachman just for the fun of the thing.

"I haven't had so much sport in a year," said Cal, after he had taken off a coachman's high hat with a well-directed shot.

"Yes, young fellow, and that coachy will have sport with us if we don't dust. He's getting off his box now," said Ed. "Cheese it, fellows."

They did dust, for a fact, but not before little Cal had come pretty near having a piece taken out of his ear by the whip of that very mad coachman, who had given chase to the young scamp.

Then they ran for all they were worth, and never stopped till they were safe at home.

CHAPTER VII.

HAVING seen the Old Man well started for home, Shorty and the Kid proceeded to follow him at a more leisurely pace.

"Did you ever see his nibs run so fast before, dad?" asked Charlie, stopping to laugh at his poor old grandpop.

"Never did, sonny. I think we'll put him up against some of der champion runners. Nobody will ever give him deir dust, I tell you."

"Do you suppose he'll want to set the house on fire when he gets home and finds it all right?"

"Well, I guess he'll raise der roof, anyhow, he'll be so mad."

Having just played a snap on the Old Man, it must not be supposed that the two runts meant to take a vacation.

Not they!

A snap was a snap, no matter who got it, and if the Old Man did not happen to be around they were not at all averse to working it on some one else, if it happened to be ready.

As they were crossing Broadway they met a tramp, the same tramp, by the way, that Mr. Burwick had experimented with an hour or so previous.

The fellow knew Shorty and the Kid from their resemblance to the Old Man, and he stopped right in front of them and began to laugh most demonstratively.

"I say, pop, did you draw this in a prize package?"

"No, Kiddy, I guess it must be yours 'cause you noticed it first."

"Oho-oho, I shall die, I know I shall!" roared the tramp.

"Nobody's got any objections to your dying just as soon as you please, Mr. Rip Van Winkle boiled down," said the Kid.

"Der sooner you do it, der more agreeable it'll be for your relations, I guess," added Shorty, "'cause den dey kin divide up your property between 'em."

"All der property he's got, is real estate," observed Charlie, "and he carries dat around with him."

"To think o' my meeting you two fellers, after just coming from a matinee with the old gent," cried the tramp, indulging in the most riotous mirth.

"With der Old Man?" cried Shorty. "Why, my pop wouldn't be seen at a dog fight with such a looking jay as you, old feller."

"Well, we had a circus together, anyhow, ho, ho, ho!"

"You're der star tumbler, I s'pose? Looks as if you'd had lots of acquaintance with tumblers, too."

"Oh, yes, but I take it out of a can mostly these times."

"Well, I say, old Money-bags, you may like being run over," said the Kid, "but I'm blowed if I do. Two or three sleighs have just missed us a'ready, and we mightn't be so lucky der next time."

"Say, I want to tell you something, Mr. George Burwick," said the tramp, turning and following the two sawed-offs as they crossed to the sidewalk.

"Well, what is it, Handsome?"

"Didn't suppose I'd meet you two after taking lunch with the old feller, your dad, blessed if I did."

"Go tell dat to der kids," said Charlie. "You can't make men believe any such fairy tale as dat."

"Honest Injun I did," said the tramp, earnestly, and then he stopped laughing long enough to give Shorty a brief account of his late interview with Mr. Burwick.

Both the Kid and Shorty laughed as heartily as the tramp did when he had finished his plain, unvarnished tale, and each asked him a lot of questions.

"We'll get a good snap out of this, Chawles," said Shorty, and then he whispered a few words in his son's ear.

"That'll captivate der cookey, dad. Won't his nibs feel funny?"

"Bet yer life. Say, Mr. Rich, would you mind getting a shave and a hair-cut, and maybe a bath wouldn't hurt you if you don't think it would take too long, and den coming around to our house about seven o'clock this eve? I want you, bad."

"Well, no, I don't know as I would, provided——" and the fellow winked in a manner not to be misunderstood.

"I catch on," laughed Shorty. "There's two cases. Go get a pair of millionaire's misfits in a Baxter avenue shoe-shop, and den show up this evening."

"You don't want me to have another round with the Old Man, do you?" said the bum with a grin.

"Nixy, cully, I want you for——" and Shorty whispered two words in the man's ear.

"All right, pard. I won't disappoint you. Sorry I can't help you eat your Christmas turkey."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Rothschild."

"Would in a minute if I wasn't engaged to another rich bloke."

"Oh, we always give millionaires der preference. Quite right to keep your appointment, Baron."

"Sorry to leave you, gents. See you this evening. My coach is getting painted, so I'll have to walk. Over the gutter, gents."

"Do you think any of dat two dollars of yours is going for hair cuts or shaves, or second-hand shoes, pop?" asked Charlie, when the tramp was out of hearing.

"Cert."

"Then you're a bigger chump dan der Ole Man. Them two cases are going for beer, dad, and don't you make an error."

"Nixy."

"Oh, you'll believe anything after this, dad."

"I'll bet a box o' cigars, Kidlet, that der bum turns up dis evening at der time I told him, and fixed up, too, ready for biz."

"You might as well make it two boxes, dad, if you want to lose so bad, for dat's what you'll do."

"I'll make it three, if you like, and good cigars, too, der best in der market."

"I'll go you, dad."

"You think that bum won't come back, don't you?"

"He won't."

"I say he will."

"'Cause why, dad?"

"'Cause he knows a good snap when he sees it, and he's sure this is a daisy. Come around on Third avenue for a few minutes, I want to get some duds. He's just about der guv'nor's size, ain't he?"

"Putty much, pop, but not so fat."

"Oh, we'll fix that all right."

What Shorty had to see about on the east side of town will come out at the proper time, but as he and the Kid were going up that thoroughfare on the way home, they had another chance for a good snap.

Two hilarious Germans, who had said "*Gesundheit*" to each other some few times more than even the very best of good fellowship would seem to warrant, were coming along the avenue, arm-in-arm, singing at the top of their voices.

It is the national characteristics of a Dutchman to sing, no matter what the circumstances may be, and these two fellows were proving themselves to be true sons of the Vaterland with all the lustiness of lung peculiar to our cousins German.

They had been celebrating the day in the Dutch style and were now going to add a bit of Chinese, for they had fireworks sticking out of their side pockets, and probably intended to set them off at a convenient time.

It was just as probable, too, that in a fit of absent-mindedness, consequent upon a too generous indulgence in the national beverage, they had purchased the rockets, Roman candles, etcetera, without any very clear idea as to their need or appropriateness, and perhaps that is just how they came to have them.

At any rate they did have them, and this indisputable fact gave the two Shortys a chance for another Christmas snap.

"Get onto the Dutchmen, pop," said the Kid.

"Yes, been celebrating."

"Haven't got over it yet, dad."

"Going to wind up with a concert and fireworks in der English style?"

"Let's set off der fireworks now, pop, and have our part of the fun," suggested Charlie, knocking the ashes off the cigar he was smoking.

"Putty good graft, Chollie, my boy," returned Shorty, imitating his his son's action.

The two musical Dutchmen were taking up the whole of the sidewalk, and if it had been twice as wide they would have got there just the same.

Shorty had to take to the gutter, as the two votaries of Gambrinus passed by, but the Kid managed to slip into a doorway, and so escaped being served up *a la* Juggernaut.

When the tipsy Dutchmen at last passed on they each had a lighted cigar in their outside pockets.

Shorty and the Kid had deposited them there.

The result was as might have been expected.

Fire and gunpowder were never known to agree.

It always was touch and go between them, from the earliest days.

Every time they come together, there is sure to be a blow up.

That is how it eventuated in this instance.

The people on the avenue were suddenly very much astonished to see a skyrocket shoot up in the air, carrying a Derby hat along with it.

The second Dutchman was equally astonished to feel the whole side of his coat torn out, while explosions were heard all around.

You never saw two more surprised fellows in all your life.

I really believe that they had forgotten all about those rockets and candles, and did not know what was up even now.

Pop, bang, fizz!

Whissh!

Whirr, fff, boom!

Punk-punk-punk!

Sky rockets went chasing after the elevated railroad trains overhead, fire-balls went banging against the windows of the ten story flats over the stores, and chasers, double enders, and common crackers began to have a free fight then and there.

"Ach himmel! Donnerwetter! was machts das aus!" yelled the Dutchman.

"Fire!" shouted a street unchin. "Put 'em out!"

Then the two Dutchmen got scared and started to run.

One of them fell over an ash barrel standing at the curb, while the fireworks in his pockets proceeded to have their little racket out.

The other ran into a policeman, who by some strange fatality happened to be where he was least wanted, and was run in himself.

Then somebody with more brains than he very well knew how to

get along with rang a fire alarm from the box at the corner, and then there was the deuce to pay indeed.

Three hose companies, a hook and ladder, and an insurance patrol wagon came dashing up in about a minute, two hundred and seventeen boys came trooping in from Avenue A and the side streets, and there was the biggest kind of a fuss.

Shorty and the Kid struck out for the nearest elevated railroad station and watched the commotion from the platform.

The man who had given the alarm began to feel like a fool instead of a hero, and wanted to crawl into a hole somewhere and draw it after him.

Everybody talked at once and nobody was listened to; the surface cars were blocked, the drivers indulged in impolite but forcible language, all the passengers wanted to get out at once and there was the biggest kind of a hubbub.

Then it was discovered that there wasn't, never had been, and wasn't going to be a fire, and the department was as mad as if they had been voted extra pay all around.

Shorty and the Kid were the coolest fellows in the crowd, but even they, in the excitement of the moment, went up the wrong steps and found themselves going down-town instead of up, after they had boarded the first train that came along.

"Pop," said the Kid, "we're a couple of chumps."

"Speak for yourself, Chawles."

"Well, we are. We don't want to go down-town."

"Oh, I thought we did," and then they both laughed.

At the first station they got out, crossed the street and took the next train up-town.

When they reached the scene of the late excitement they found that things had not yet quieted down by a large majority.

"It don't take much to get up a racket in New York," observed Shorty.

"Nixey, but it takes a lot to quiet it down afterwards, dad."

"All dat hullabaloo over two cigar butts."

"Dere always is trouble over a 'but,' dad."

"Dat reminds me. What does a locomotive chew, Chawles?"

The Kid looked grieved.

"If you're going to spring any tacky old gags like dat on me, dad, I'll get up and go into der next car."

"Don't car' if you do, Chawles."

"You make me tired."

"That's what the wheel said to der smith."

"Well, that's wright, dad."

"Oh, I see you've been studying der map of dat joke."

"You gotter have one with the kind you make, pop."

"Well, what's the difference between you and a mule?"

"Just the division between der seats, p op. Gimme another."

Shorty concluded not to ask any more conundrums after that.

They hadn't panned out the way he had been led to expect they would.

"Guess Gawgie must have taken me for his son Pete," chuckled the Kid. "He used to lick me for getting off old gags like that as long ago as I kin recollect."

"What are you going to collect?" asked Shorty.

"Chumps. Don't you want to head der list?"

"No. I don't want to play second violin to you, Kiddy, and you're de champion chump as far as I know."

"Oh, you're too modest," said Charlie, and then, as they had come to their station, which they knew by the sign and not by the unintelligible yell of the gateman, they got off and proceeded on their way.

CHAPTER VII.

At last all the Shortys were safely housed after their Christmas day rambles.

George and Charlie winked at each other when they saw Josiah, but said nothing about the tramp and the little interview they had had with him.

Josiah looked dignified, but made no reference to the false alarm of fire, hoping that Shorty or the Kid would speak about it themselves and so give the thing away.

Those two runts were not making a donation party for anybody just at that time, however.

"I say, pop," said Shorty, as sat on one side of the fire in the library, the Kid being on the other side, and the Old Man in the middle.

"Well, George?"

"Don't you want to play Santa Claus and give the boys a surprise? I see you have bought a bully tree and fixings."

"Yes, I don't know but what it would be a good idea, George."

"Why, cert. Ask der neighbors in and have a regular Christmas night blow out. We 'most always do it."

"Yes, but how can I get the proper costume, George?"

"Oh, we'll fix you up from the old trunks in der garret, pop."

"Yes, and I think it would be very nice to read or recite the poem about the visit of St. Nicholas. Children always like that, you know."

"To be sure dey do."

"Better read it, grandpop," said the Kid. "You're getting too old to learn poetry by heart and spout it off like you used to."

"Never recited poetry in my life," snapped Josiah. "Do you think I'm a school girl?"

"No, 'cause you don't chew gum."

Well, it was arranged to ask in a few of the neighbors and their children, and say nothing about the tree, which was to be a surprise all around, even to the Shorty kids, the latter, with all their cleverness, not having yet discovered the secret.

By this time it was getting well along toward the dinner hour, and the gentlemen went up-stairs to dress, the ladies having seen that the boys had not forgotten to improve their appearance since coming in.

That Christmas dinner was a howling success, and reflected great credit upon the executive talents of Mrs. Josiah.

The room was brilliantly lighted in the first place, and then there was a center-piece in the shape of a miniature Christmas tree full of lighted tapers on the table, while beside each plate was a wax candle in a pretty silver stand.

The whitest linen, the shiniest glass, the brightest silver and the handsomest flowers assisted at making the table a thing of beauty and a joy forever, while the happy faces of those gathered around the board completed the picture of peace and contentment.

The Old Man carved, and Ginger Jones, in a swallow-tailed coat and an air of the greatest dignity, passed the viands, assisted by two smart waitresses in white aprons and caps and most bewitching smiles.

Everybody had all they wanted and nobody felt the necessity of gorging themselves, as though this was to be the last meal they were ever to eat.

Good dinners were not a rarity at the Burwicks', and consequently all hands ate what they wanted and only what they wanted, the boys included, an example which plenty of supposed-to-be high-toned people would do well to follow.

"What are we going to do to-night, papa?" asked Cal, when the dessert was being discussed.

"Oh, have in a few friends, I suppose, and have some music and dancing," said Josiah, carelessly. "I have invited the Hallidays, and the Hudson-Reveres, and the Dusenburys, and Van Tassels, and Schuylers, and a few others."

"That's what you call a few, is it? Why, there are three Hallidays, and six Hudson Rivers, and eight Dusenburys, not counting the old folks at all."

"The more the merrier, my son," said Josiah, and then he changed the subject, fearing that he would let the pussy out of the sack.

After dinner the three boys put on their coats and caps and went out to have a run, being admonished by their fond mothers to be sure to be in before seven o'clock and not to get lost.

"Just as if we were kids," said Cal, scornfully, when he was in the street.

"Like to see anybody lose us in New York," added Peter, that young namesake of mine being particularly fresh.

"And I'm sure nobody would steal us," chirped Ed. "We ain't good-looking enough."

The first thing they struck was an old woman with a flowered carpet bag, a big green parasol, a forty year old bonnet and a faded silk dress.

She was probably from the rural districts, and had come down to surprise her relatives and would, no doubt, be greatly surprised herself to find that they had gone out for the day.

"See here, bub!" she said to Cal, "what is the quickest way to get to Fifty-seventh street and Ninth avenue?"

"Run," said Cal, laconically.

The old woman's reply was equally prompt and decisive.

She swung around that green parasol of hers, and if she had not miscalculated the boy's size, would have taken his head off.

Perhaps Cal's dodging had something to do with it, but at any rate the parasol swept by a foot above his fur cap.

The old lady swung around, and came mighty near to sitting down upon the cold sidewalk.

A friendly lamp-post gave her its aid, however, and she reeled against this, looking as mad as mad.

"Don't ye be sassy to me," she snapped. "Can't ye answer a civil question?"

"Well, if you wasn't in a hurry, you might hire a telegraph boy to show you the way, ma'am; but I suppose you want to get there to-night."

"How far is it?"

"About three miles."

"Dear me! I s'pose if Sophrony had knowed I was coming, she'd have sent a carriage; but I wanted to s'prise 'em, and so I never wrote."

"Well, you're a long way from her house, ma'am," said Pete.

"Maybe you know 'em? My daughter Sophrony, she married better'n the other gals; but she don't put on no style, and 'casionally she writes, and now and again I write back. Allus send the letters to Mr. Hudson's office. Kind o' funny, too."

"Ain't it?" chuckled Pete. "We ought to know her, but we don't. The Hudsons are an old family, ma'm."

"Yes, so I've heerd, but you see Hudson he had an aunt that left him all her money, only her name was Revere, and she wanted him to take it, leastwise, she said he couldn't have the money unless he did."

"Why, you don't mean to say——"

"Yes, but then Sophrony, that's my daughter, she said she could be just as stuck up as the old aunt, and that she wasn't going to give up her name for a lot of money, and so they just hitched hosses some way or nuther, and now they calls theirself——"

"Hudson-Revere!" cried the three boys in chorus.

"Why, land sakes, how did ye know that?"

"Why, they live just around the corner from us. Guess you'd 've been surprised if you'd walked over to the west side."

"Why, don't they live in Fifty-seventh street?"

"Haven't lived there for four years."

"My sakes! Well—well! it's lucky I met you. Here, little boys, I've got a seed cooky in my bag, and I'll give it to you to divide."

"Thanks awfully. We ain't hungry, ma'am," said the boys, with the greatest unanimity.

"Well, it's just as well, then, for I haven't got but six, and they've got to go around. Sophrony's children are awful pigs when it comes to cake."

"We'll show you where she lives, ma'am," shouted the boys in chorus.

They didn't want that funny old woman on their hands any longer than they could help.

Consequently they were awfully polite, and were willing to show her the way at once.

"Great Scott! I hope she won't want to come to our house," whispered Cal to Pete.

"I'll bet she will, and then she'll save her cookies to take back to Squashtown."

"What an old sight she is, anyhow!"

It was very lucky for Cal that the old lady did not hear his last remark, or she would probably have taken better aim with her parasol that time.

Well, the boys got rid of the old guy at last, and then sailed over into the east side, where the streets were crowded, to see what fun they could pick up.

There was plenty of it for the asking.

First, they met a procession of Antiques and Horribles out on parade.

Some rode in wagons, some were on horseback, and a few sat in open carriages, the biggest part of them, however, going on foot.

There were Yankees, sailors, soldiers, knights, Indians, niggers, Chinamen, hobbledohs and nondescripts of all kinds.

A dozen comical cops, made up with hats as big as bushel baskets, long-tailed coats, buttons the size of plates, and base-ball bats for "billies," went in front and cleared the way.

Then came the marshal, on a nag whose bones seemed ready to drop out, and who was pushed from behind by several big fellows in red shirts.

Then came the band in a big wagon and never, out of a Zulu village, had its like been seen.

Every member had a different suit and no two played in the same key, the instruments being fog horns, tin pans, rattles, drums, trumpets, sleigh bells, cow bells, and every other kind of bell, and a big bull fiddle worked by two men, who went at it as if their lives depended upon it.

Next came a wagon drawn by two wheezy old horses mounted by a couple of Uncle Toms, while in the cart itself was a howling mob of hoodlums, gotten up to represent the various nations of the earth.

"I don't think it's very funny," said Cal. "I'd like to snowball the gang in the cart."

"Yes, and get slugged for your trouble," remarked Pete.

That young fellow had a big head.

"Jiminy jinks!" cried Ed, excitedly, "if there isn't grandpop."

Sure enough!

Walking between two tough fellows made up as clowns, was that poor old man, Josiah Burwick, Esq.

How he got there nobody knew.

He didn't like the thing, evidently, and was trying to get away.

The two clowns were holding on to him, however, and everybody was laughing, yelling and blowing horns.

"Get on to Santa Claus!" cried the gang.

"Ah, dat's Patsy Mulligan fixed up to look like an Alderman. Don't he carry it off fine?"

"Is dat a wig, or ain't he got no hair?"

"Course he has. Dat's only a guy."

The Old Man taken for Patsy Mulligan, the heeler!

Horrible thought!

Josiah was gesticulating and shouting, but nobody could hear a word he said for the noise.

His captors thought it was great fun, however, and they marched him along in spite of himself.

"Are yez wid us?" they yelled.

"Yis!" howled the crowd.

"Get on to his nibs, der President of der East Side Chimpanzees!"

Then the Old Man said something, for his mouth opened and shut violently, but nobody knew what it was.

"Let's get him out of there," said Cal.

"Right you are," added Pete.

"Follow me!" cried Ed.

Then that young joker grabbed up a heap of snow, rushed into the line, and pasted one clown in the ear with his imitation ice cream.

Pete did the same for the other fellow, and made him feel sick.

Cal kicked both of them behind their backs, and they let go the Old Man in a hurry.

Then the three Kids grabbed Josiah, and hustled him out of the line to the sidewalk, and down a side street in a hurry.

They never stopped till they had gone half a block, and found that the crowd was not following them.

"Oh, dear, stop, stop," gasped the Old Man, dropping down upon a horse-block at the curb. "I can't go another step."

"We had to run, papa, so that the crowd wouldn't catch us."

"Yes, grandpop, they would have mauled us if we hadn't," said Pete.

"How did you get into such a crowd?" asked Ed.

The Old Man took off his hat, mopped his shiny crown with a big handkerchief, sighed and said:

"Dear me, dear me! Was ever a respectable citizen subjected to such an outrage? The idea of being forced to march with that rabble!"

The boys agreed to this, but they were dying to know how the thing had come about.

They wanted to laugh, now that it was all over, but didn't dare to.

It had been comical, for a fact, to see that dignified and wrathful

old aristocrat walking with such a mob, and the boys chuckled now as they thought of it.

"You were good boys to get me out of that crowd," said Josiah, replacing his hat—"very good boys. I don't know what I would have done if you had not come along. The idea of those masquerading idiots making me march with them, and thinking it funny, too!"

The Old Man's wrath and indignation made him perspire again, and he had to repeat the swabbing act for fear of taking cold.

"But I thought you were at home, papa," said Cal. "How did you happen to be away over in this part of town?"

"Your mother wanted some old fashioned something or other, and there was nobody else to send for it so I went."

"Where was Ginger?"

"Busy."

"And Mike?"

"Busy."

"And the girls?"

"Busy."

"What were they so busy about?"

"Oh, they were trim—that is, they were fixing up for this evening."

The Old Man got up at this moment and said he guessed that he was rested sufficiently to go home, that they were all very nice boys, especially Cal, and that he hoped every one of those ruffians would get into the station house before morning.

"But how did they get hold of you?" asked the boys.

"Oh, they saw me standing on the walk and just grabbed me. Said they were mashed on my shape. The idea!"

"Awful!"

"Said they'd make me president of the club, wouldn't let me get away, and there wasn't a policeman to be seen. Made me walk half a dozen blocks, the wretches."

Again the boys wanted to grin, but if they indulged in this desire they took particularly good care that Josiah did not see them.

When they reached the house it was just beginning to grow dark, and some of the street lamps were already lighted.

"Goodness me! What's the matter?" cried the Old Man, suddenly.

"Has there been a fire?"

No wonder he asked.

Shorty and the Kid sat on the front stoop smoking and shivering, while every window and door in the front of the house stood wide open.

"For heaven's sake, what's the matter?" asked Josiah. "Is this another one of your snaps?" to Shorty.

"Nope," said the latter.

"What does it mean, then?"

"House-cleaning, pop."

The Old Man could hardly credit his senses.

"House cleaning on Christmas Day of all days?"

"Yes, pop. Angie, she got taken with a fit of cleaning up 'cause she saw some dust on the parlor carpet, and she's had the whole house turned upside down. Says she ain't going to have company coming into a dirty house if she knows it, pop."

Josiah groaned.

He had seen evidences of the house-cleaning mania before, and knew what it meant.

House upside-down, no place to go to, dust, racket and confusion, till the fit had passed.

"Can't we stay in the library, George?" he mildly asked.

"Dirtiest place in the house, pop. The missus says we men are a lot of pigs. Brass-work wants polishing, curtains are full o' smoke and——"

"Yes, yes, but why go through all this to-day of all times? Why, good grief! the company will be here in——"

Just then Ginger Jones came flying out of the front door in a terrible hurry, fell over Shorty, sent the latter rolling down the stoop and followed immediately afterward, fortunately alighting on his head and so sustaining no injuries.

"What's der row, Ginge?" asked Shorty, sitting up. "Is dat der way you allus come out?"

"Beg parding, Marse Go'ge; didn't see yo', 'deed I didn'. De missus she wan' me to go to de sto' right off an' get pneumonia."

"H'm! We'll all get it if we have to stay out here much longer," laughed Shorty.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. JOSIAH had suddenly taken it into her head that the house needed cleaning, and, with an energy worthy of a better cause, proceeded to set about it, regardless of the day or the time or anything else.

With her dress turned up and a sweeping cap on her head, a broom in one hand and a dust cloth in the other, she descended upon that unhappy house, turned all hands out, terrorized the poor servants, and stirred up things generally.

Other people's convenience or opinions didn't make a cent's worth of difference.

The house needed cleaning, and she was going to see it done, whether or no.

Deliver us from a wife with an insane desire to "tidy up" at all times and seasons, irrespective of the need of it, and bound to put it through.

Josiah had been sent over to the East side merely to get him out of the house, and after that it was easy enough to bounce Shorty and the Kid *sans ceremonie*.

Neither they nor their wives could kick, for Mrs. Josiah was the boss and knew it.

No woman ever cleans house one room at a time.

That would be absurd.

"No, sir, the whole house must take it at once, from sewer to flag-staff.

Shorty and Charlie wanted to retreat to the library, but the boss sweeper wouldn't have it.

The place was actually filthy, she said, in the moderate manner common to all women when excited, and had got to be cleaned out thoroughly.

Christmas had evidently had no soothing influence upon her when the house-cleaning madness had taken possession of her head.

The brass andirons were terribly tarnished, she found, and hence the sudden dispatching of Ginger Jones for ammonia.

"I'se gotter get dat pneumonia, sure," ejaculated the coon as he got up after upsetting George.

"Yes, we'll all get it," said Shorty.

"Will you, Marse Go'ge? Den I needn't ter go myse'f, fo' I know dat yer funnis need 'tendin' to dis—"

"Ginger!" came in thrill tones from the house, and Mrs. Josiah suddenly appeared in all her war paint.

"Yes'm."

"Go, put some coal on the furnace fire, it's nearly out."

"Yes'm, but I hain't got de pneumonia yet."

"Well! You *are* the laziest man I ever did see. Go, get it."

"Befo' I get de coal, ma'm?"

"No—yes! Oh, I don't know! Do something, for goodness sake, and don't stand there staring."

Shorty caught on to a snap.

"Here, Ginge, you go and get the coal," he said. "I'll get the other stuff."

The coon went away, and then Shorty gave Peter a quarter to go to the nearest drug store and get a bottle of ammonia for housecleaning.

All three boys went, of course, and then Shorty said to Josiah:

"Can't you do nothing, pop?"

"When Angelina gets one of these fits? I wouldn't dare try it."

"But it's Christmas, pop."

"Makes no difference, George. She'd do it if it was Sunday, if the fit took her."

"How long does it generally last, pop?"

"All day, as a rule, George," said the Old Man, sadly.

"Let's declare a rebellion, pop. We can't stay out here and freeze, and we can't go to der club."

"No use, George. She's bound to keep on till she's through with it."

"I'm blessed if I'd stand it guv'nor."

"You'd have to, George."

"Let's all kick," said the Kid.

"Not a bit of use, Charlie."

Just then the boys came back with the ammonia.

At the same time Ginger came up from the cellar.

It was now quite dark.

"Yo' got dat pneumonia, Marse Go'ge?" asked the coon.

"Yes, Ginge," said Shorty, taking the bottle from Pete.

"What am it like, sah?"

"Oh, it's the bulliest kind of a perfumery!"

"Dat so?"

"Bet yer life!"

"Yo' don' tol' me? Anyfing like odyclone?"

"Ten times nicer."

"Lor'!"

"Want to smell it, Ginge?"

"Yas'r," said the delighted coon.

The Old Man was talking to Cal and did not observe what was going forward.

Otherwise he would have interfered in the little business.

He didn't, however.

"Take a good sniff," said George, uncorking the bottle right under Ginger's nose.

The coon took a powerful old sniff and then gasped.

The stuff was powerful, and even the little that Shorty got was enough to make him weep.

The coon got a big dose.

He choked, tumbled over backwards and hit his head on a rug.

If he had struck the tiling squarely he would have split it—the marble, of course.

Shorty put the cork in the bottle, chuckled and watched the coon.

"Guess der colored angels will be singing 'Dere's a new coon in town' to-night, pop," said Charlie.

"No, he's all right."

Pretty soon Ginger got up, rubbed his head, looked sort of puzzled, and then remarked wisely:

"Golly, Marse G'o'ge, dat am a mos' pow'ful scent!"

Even Shorty could not help laughing at this, while the little fellows just howled.

"What's all this?" demanded Josiah, discovering for the first time that there was something up.

"Nothing, pop," laughed Shorty. "Ginger got a little touch of the pneumonia, that's all."

"Golly! Reckon dat bu'n a hole in my hank'chief if I put him on," muttered the coon.

Just then Mrs. Josiah came out.

"Haven't you got that ammonia yet, you lazy fellow?" she asked.

"Yes'm, I got um, an' got um bad, too, I spect."

"Oh, I say, let up on dis business," said Shorty. "Der boys is froze and so is pop. Let's shut der winders and have some comfort."

"George Burwick!" said Angie, sharply, "I'll trouble you to attend to your own affairs."

"All right, sweetness. Come on, Chawles."

Then Shorty and the Kid swept the Old Man and the boys into the house, closed the front doors, lighted the gas, closed the front windows and pulled down the shades and lighted up there as well.

"Josiah Burwick! am I or am I not mistress in this house?" demanded the unfortunate woman, seized with the dusting madness.

"Come on, Kid, this way, Ginger, run up-stairs, boys," said Shorty, leading the way to the library.

Here the windows were closed and the shades pulled down, as in the parlor, Angie following mad as a hornet.

"I want you to answer my question, Josiah," she remarked, as placidly as the ocean in a storm.

Shorty went on lighting the gas, Ginger doing the same in the back parlor and closing the folding doors.

"There—there, sis, don't get mad," said the Kid. "Ginger, go in and close the dining-room."

"What do you mean by ordering my servants about in this manner, Charles Burwick?" snapped Angie.

"They aren't any more your servants than they are his," exclaimed Caddie, Charlie's wife, now appearing on the battlefield.

"Don't interfere, Caroline, if you please," said Angelina, stiffly. "I am perfectly capable of running my house without your help."

"H'm! your house!" sniffed Caddie.

"Don't go to making idiots of yourselves, girls," said Shorty's wife, Kate, who, by the way, was the mother of the other ladies.

Then they both got mad.

"I guess if Caddie and I want to quarrel it's no affair of yours, ma."

"Sister and I don't care for any of your interference, Mrs. George." Then the old lady got on her ear.

"Mrs. George, indeed! Angie, go and dress—Carrie, don't be foolish. I guess I can correct my own girls if I feel like it."

"Now, now, Kate, don't get flustered," cried Josiah. "There's no need—"

"Flustered yourself! If you weren't such a foolish old idiot you wouldn't let your wife walk over you as she does."

That got Josiah riled.

"Madam, I'll have you to understand—"

"Don't sass der guv'nor, Kate," put in Shorty.

"Let's have a free fight all around," laughed the Kid.

Indeed, it promised to be one in a short time, if matters went on as they had been going.

The women were all talking at once, the Old Man was trying to pacify them all and only got all the madder himself, and even Shorty was not sure that he ought to say something.

Suddenly in the midst of all the squabble there came a short, sharp ring at the front-door bell.

That put an end to the row in a second.

Mrs. Josiah whisked the sweeping cap off her head and cut up the back stairs in a jiffy, Mrs. Charlie fixed her crimps in the library mirror, while Mrs. George smiled, looked dignified and sailed into the front-parlor to welcome the arriving guests.

Ginger went off to answer the bell, Josiah sunk into an easy chair in front of the fire, and Shorty and the Kid exchanged grins.

"Call it a draw," said the Kid. "No fast blood, no knockin' out, on'y an exhibition fight."

"After der storm, der mud puddles," warbled Shorty.

"I hope Angie will have had time to dress," said Josiah.

"Oh, dat's all right," answered George; "it's different when a woman's married. Then she don't need four hours to fix her crimps like she does when she's expecting her young man to come and take her to der show."

"Better go into the drawing-room, boys," said the Old Man.

Shorty suddenly took out his watch, looked at it, and then made a break for the lower regions.

"Blowed if I hadn't most forgot," he muttered.

Mrs. Josiah was in the parlor ready to receive her guests by the time the first arrivals came down from the dressing-rooms.

There was no sign of her recent agitation upon her handsome face; she was arrayed like a princess, and looked as calm as a spring morning.

The boys came down neatly dressed, combed and brushed, the other ladies made their appearance, and then Josiah and the Kid sauntered in looking as happy as larks.

Quite a number of guests were now in the drawing-room, when in walked Mrs. Hudson-Revere from around the block, with Miss Elsie, aged eight, Miss Nannie, aged six, and the twins, Masters Tommy and Jimmy, while bringing up in the rear came Mr. Hudson-Revere with his eldest daughter, Beatrice, a young lady of ten, and his eldest son, Roy, a howling young swell of thirteen.

Cal, Pete and Ed pressed forward to meet the newly arrived juveniles, when an old woman in a black silk dress, green feathers, and red fan, coming up behind Mr. Hudson-Revere, caught sight of them.

"Lor' me, if they haven't asked them saucy boys!" the old lady piped up. "H'm, you're the notty boy that told me the quickest way to get to my darter's house was to run, ain't ye?" hitting Cal with her fan.

Everybody stared, Cal got as red as a beat, and the old lady went on:

"Ha! got your company manners with ye, or are ye just as sassy at a party as ye are in the street? If I was these folks I wouldn't hev invited ye, that's what I wouldn't."

Mrs. Hudson-Revere colored, twitched the old lady's sleeve, and whispered, huskily:

"Sh! That is Mrs. Burwick's son. You must be mistaken."

"Ha! No, I ain't, I know the three of 'em, brothers, I guess, but he's the wust—what say?"

"My mother, Mrs. Wilkins, Mrs. Josiah Burwick," said the younger lady, leading the older one forward.

"That bad boy's mother!" whispered Mr. Revere, maliciously, in his ma-in-law's ear.

"Lor!" said the old lady, in a perfectly audible voice, as she sank upon a sofa after the introduction, "if I haven't gone and put my foot in it agin. Why didn't you stop me, Sophrony?"

"Sh!" whispered the embarrassed lady, while all the youngsters grinned.

"Oh, you bad boy!" said Pete to Cal. "The old guy got here after all, just to pay you up for giving her lip in the street."

"Peter!" cautioned Mrs. Shorty, catching the expression.

"Yes, ma," and then that young scamp went off and played the elegant gentleman among his young friends, till you would never have supposed he ever had heard a slang word.

When nearly all the guests had arrived, Shorty beckoned the Kid into the library and said in a triumphant tone:

"You've lost them three boxes of cigars, my boy."

"He hasn't showed up, has he?"

"Rip? Yes, sirree."

"Sober?"

"As a bucket of water."

"Shaved?"

"Clean."

"New shoes?"

"Baxter street tens."

"Had a wash?"

"Clean as a bar of soap."

"Honest Injun?"

"You've got it straight."

"Where is he now?"

"I've got him safe."

"Better put him in der safe and den he can't steal nuthin'."

"Oh, he's all right. Mike will see to that."

"He knows what he's to do?"

"Bet yer life, and tumbles to it fust-class."

"Der cigars are yours, dad. I didn't think you'd win 'em, though."

"I did, then. Come on, der fun is on tap, and just beginning to run."

CHAPTER X.

ALL the guests, young and old, had assembled, and the Old Man beamed upon them like the rising moon.

The doors leading to the back parlor had been kept closed, much to the surprise of Cal, Pete, and Ed, and now the guests were seated before them, in a semicircle, the youngest in advance, leaving a space just in front of about three feet in width.

The Old Man went along the side of the room, took up a position before the closed doors, and said:

"My friends, particularly my young friends, I have a pleasant surprise in store for you, which—"

"Got any more cards in yer pocket, pop?" asked the Kid, in a hoarse whisper from behind the folding-doors.

"I will now read you that beautiful little poem entitled the Visit of Saint Nicholas," continued Josiah, unheeding the irrelevant interruption.

"Dat's right, pop, don't try to say it from memory, 'cause you'd be sure to get stuck," put in the Kid.

The Old Man produced a book from his coat-tail pocket, opened it at a marked place, smiled on the company and started off:

"'Twas the night before Christmas—"

"Why don't you say it was Christmas Eve, pop? Dat's shorter."

"And all through the house—"

"And out in der back yard, too, pop."

"Not a creature was stirring—not even a mouse—"

"Course dey wasn't. We don't have no mouses in our house, pop. Don't mention 'em anyhow, or you'll scare the women."

The Old Man looked as if he would like to choke that young interpolater behind the door.

He knew he couldn't, though, so he went right on:

"When mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap

Had just settled down for a long winter nap—"

"Course you had, you old snoozer! You always was a great and at sleeping, and how you do snore."

"When out in the lawn there arose such a clatter

That I jumped out of bed to see what was the matter."

"Did you step on any tacks, pop? Bully things to go hunting for in your bare feet, ain't they?"

"Do keep quiet, Charlie," whispered the Kid's wife.

"Go on, pop. Don't mind der kids snickering. Dey'd laugh at a funeral."

"I ran to the window and threw up the sash."

"Didn't agree with you, did it, pop? Had to throw it up. Wouldn't eat such indigestible things if I was you."

"And opened the shutters as quick as a flash."

"Bully boy, pop. Dat's when you was young, wasn't it? Couldn't do things so sudden now, could you?"

Mrs. Charlie now got up and left the room amid the tittering of the youngsters and the smiles of the older people.

"Dad's going to catch it, whispered Ed to Cal. "What's coming, anyhow? Do you know?"

"No, but I can give a pretty good guess. I think it's——"

"California!" said the Old Man in a warning tone.

"Yes, papa," and the young gentleman subsided.

The old gentleman then went on with the reading of the poem, and it is needless to add, was not annoyed with any further interruptions.

At the conclusion, being rapturously applauded, Mr. Burwick smiled, bowed, smiled again, and remarked:

"Excuse me a moment, kind friends. We will now present to your notice the tableau of 'The Dream of Santa Claus.' I will go around and see if he is ready."

The Old Man then left the parlor, and then the folding doors were drawn back a trifle to admit a funny little darky with a comical suit of clothes, a banjo and a tall white hat.

This was the Kid, of course, but the interlude was a surprise to everybody except Shorty, he and the Kid having fixed the thing up between themselves.

"Scuse me, ladies an' gemen an' little folks," said the comical moke, seating himself on a stool, "tought I might 'muse yo' while ole Santy Claus was gettin' ready to go to sleep. Does yo' like music? Wall, I jes' brung my pannier along, 'cause I reckoned yo' mought like to yar sump'n good. Jes' yo' listen a minute, chillen, an' I'll play you a nice tune."

The little runt had not forgotten to play or sing on account of having left the stage, and the way he made that banjo hum was good to hear.

After playing a number of airs, lively as well as touching, he gave his audience a rattling plantation ditty, which set them all to laughing.

While this was going on, the Old Man had hurried around to the back parlor, where he found Shorty.

"Got the costume ready, George?"

"Yes, pop. Come into the library and I'll make you up while der Kid is singing. Dey won't let him off under ten minutes, and if you ain't ready then I'll set der boys to singin' something to fill in."

In the library a costume intended for Santa Claus was laid out.

Shorty proceeded to get the Old Man into it, and then, after adjusting his wig and beard, painted, or made up as it is called, Mr. Burwick's face so that not even his own child would know him.

The Old Man made a daisy St. Nicholas, being fat and round and rosy, nature having supplied the proper figure, while art, as represented by Shorty, did the rest.

Being all ready, the Old Man proceeded to the back parlor where the Christmas tree stood, gayly lighted and loaded with the most gorgeous fruit.

"All ready, pop?" asked Shorty.

"Yes."

"Well, den, take yer place."

There was a mossy bank made of fur rugs, and green tissue paper laid over a couple of soap boxes, on one side of the tree, and upon this the Old Man placed himself and appeared to be asleep.

"Let her go," said Shorty, the Kid having just finished his little entertainment.

Shorty grabbed one door while the Kid took the other, and then then they were drawn aside.

A very pretty scene revealed itself.

In the center of the room stood the tree full of tiny wax candles,

gold, silver and different colored balls, festoons of red and white popcorn, silver wire representing hoar frost, bags of candy, dolls, jumping jacks, and everything else that could be thought of.

The room was hung with evergreens in heavy festoons, the floor was covered with a white cloth, representing snow, and a fringe of tin icicles hung over the archway.

Under the tree, upon a green bank, Santa Claus lay asleep, and this was supposed to be his dream.

But if that was Santa Claus on the right, whose was that other figure on the left?

Did everybody see double, or had Santa Claus been cut in two and spread around so as to make more of him?

It was very strange, but——

"Cockadoodle doo!"

This was the rooster that crowed in the morn.

His crowing was the signal for Santa Claus to awake, come forward and greet his young friends.

Then, to the bewilderment of the crowd of youngsters, two copies of the good saint arose, stretched their arms, and came forward.

Santa Claus evidently had a double.

There was two of him, but which was he, and which was his reflection was hard to make out.

Two fat, round, red-faced men of the same height, shape and weight, dressed exactly alike and wearing the same happy smile, came forward.

Each was dressed in a fur coat and cap, with red breeches and high, russet leather boots, everything of the same color, pattern, cut and texture.

Each had a white beard and long, flowing locks, each had a red face and nose, and each had a round red wart on the right side of his nose.

There wasn't the slightest difference between them.

Who ever heard of two Santa Clauses?

Here they were, at all events, and you couldn't tell one from the other.

The Old Man, fancying till now that he was the sole and only representative of the jolly old St. Nick, in that house, at least, came forward and smiled.

So did the tramp, whom Shorty had transformed to look just like his respected parent.

The Old Man heard the step and looked around.

Then he stopped, dumfounded.

Was that his reflection that he saw?

It couldn't be.

He stooped, put his hands on his knees and stared at the other Santa Claus.

The latter repeated the movement, and there they both stood staring at each other.

It was as if the two Dromios had put on the garb of Kris Kringle.

The Old Man coughed, rubbed his eyes and look puzzled.

The other fellow did the same thing.

What could it mean?

Josiah had not believed in an actual Santa Claus for half a century, but his ineredulity was now shaken.

Perhaps he was a real person after all, and this was he.

How would he like being personated by some one else and his fame thus rudely taken from him?

Doubtless he wouldn't like it.

That's what Mr. Burwick thought.

The whole thing was a surprise to the crowd in the parlor and they just shrieked.

Something must be decided and at once.

"Who the deuce are you?" asked the Old Man, stepping forward.

"Santa Claus! What are you doing here?"

"Why, I'm Santa Claus myself."

"Get out, you old dufler! You're a fraud!"

The Old Man knew that well enough, but how did the other fellow find it out?

He must be Santa Claus himself to know so much.

Anyhow, he came forward, smiled and said:

"Good-evening, Kids—how do, ladies? I am the one, only and original, protected-by-copyright Santa Claus. Beware of base imitations. None genuine without trade mark. That other fellow is a dry

goods saint, and he order be in a window on Broadway this minute. I will now proceed to treat all hands."

The Old Man was struck all of a heap.

Could this be Shorty putting up a snap on him?

No.

There stood Shorty, in a swallow-tail coat, at one side of the arch, smiling radiantly.

Could it be the Kid, then?

Not at all.

The Kid sat on a stool opposite Shorty, playing softly on his banjo.

Who in the name of common sense was it, then?

The bona-fide saint?

Nonsense!

That was not possible.

Whoever he was, however, he was taking all the honor and glory and fame right away from the Old Man.

He went to the tree, took down an armful of toys, candies, et cetera, and began rapidly distributing them among the young ones.

"Here, here! stop that!" cried Josiah. "We can't have two Santas. I'm the real one, so you get out."

The other fellow winked at the Old Man, put his thumb alongside his red nose and observed:

"Jest you mosey, old un, or I might take a fall out o' you. Go down in the kitchen and tell der cook to give yer a hot cup o' coffee and be sure an' have it hot? See?"

The Old Man saw.

He likewise tumbled.

Santa Claus was a tramp,

He was also *the* tramp, the same with whom Josiah had had that little seance in the morning.

"Thought it was me, didn't you, pop?" laughed Shorty. "Thought you'd play roots on me, hey? Going to pay me out for foolin' you, wasn't you? Who takes der biscuit now, pop?"

"Don't mind dat ole duffer," said the tramp, passing around the good things, "he's only an imitation."

Poor Josiah felt sick.

Every time he appeared as Santa Claus something happened.

He would be blessed if he ever tried it again.

He went off and sat down in his easy chair before the library fire, looking decidedly miserable.

"How did Shorty happen to have two suits just alike?" he thought. Shorty didn't.

They had both been hired from a Third avenue costumer.

See?

Meanwhile, that transmogrified bum was having no end of a lark.

He was a natural wag and the dry remarks he made in distributing the presents, caused all hands to shout.

Nobody knew who he was, but they laughed and enjoyed it all the same.

"Why don't the other one come out and do suthin'?" piped up the old lady with Mrs. Revere. "I only had two pop-corn balls. The children gets everything."

"Hush, mother," said poor Mrs. Hudson-Revere, while her husband just giggled.

He had never liked his wife's relations, anyhow, and it was just cake and pie to him to see the old woman make a porker of herself before her daughter and the whole crowd.

"Guess the old girl won't want to come down to see us for another six years," he remarked.

The distribution of presents was still going on, and everybody got something.

There was nothing very valuable, but when Santa Claus gave old Mr. Halliday from next door a squeaking doll, the uproar was tremendous.

Finally Shorty, and the Kid, and the ladies assisted Santa Claus, and the tree was stripped of its more valuable fruit.

"Let's have a dance," cried Shorty, and then while Mrs. Kate went to the piano to play, two or three sets were formed, all of youngsters.

They danced around the tree and had no end of fun, Santa Claus sitting on a sofa and taking it all in.

"I ain't had so much fun in forty years," he mused. "What's the good of being a tramp, anyhow? No reason why I couldn't have had a

nice home like this myself, if I'd only stuck to business and let rum alone."

A moist-eyed, melancholy-looking Santa Claus presently beckoned Shorty into the hall and said:

"Say, ole feller, let me get off these togs and go away. I'll get to blubberin', if I don't."

"Why, what's der matter?" asked Shorty, kindly.

"Dere's a lump in my t'roat now, an' if I stay it'll come up, an' den I'll break down. I might ha' had all dis if I'd stuck to business, but I didn't and now look at me. Let me go, Mr. Geoge."

"Hold on, hold on," said Shorty, gently detaining the man. "What was your business when you stuck to it?"

"Stage carpenter. That's how I came to tumble to your play, for I know all about theaters."

"Will you stick to business and give up drink if I get you a job?"

"Will you do that?" asked the other, fervently.

"You bet your life. I never worked a snap with half der vim dat I'll work this one, my friend."

"God bless you, Mr. George. This has been a happy Christmas for me."

"It'll only be the first of a lot more just like it," said Shorty.

"Come and see pop, and make it up with him."

The two started toward the library, but just then something happened.

Josiah, sitting all alone, suddenly thought:

"See here, what's the use of my moping? I'll just pay those young fellows off for this thing."

Then he called Ginger, and gave him a few whispered directions.

"All right, Marse Burwick," said Ginger with a grin, as he went away. "I do jes' yo' say."

Just as Shorty and Santa Claus were about to enter the library every light in the house went out.

That was Josiah's little job on Shorty and the Kid.

It threatened to be less funny than the Old Man had anticipated, however.

The children, frightened at the sudden darkness, for even the candles on the Christmas tree had been put out, lest they might set fire to the little ones' clothing, screamed and became panic-stricken, one or two fainting away.

Some of the older ones were alarmed, too, and great confusion ensued.

"What's the matter now?" cried Shorty.

"Quick, this way, follow me," cried the ex-tramp, dragging Shorty after him. "We mustn't let the kids get frightened."

He quickly found his way to the parlor by keeping to the wall, and then, in a cheery voice, he said:

"Don't be scared, dearies. Old Santa Claus is here, and he won't let nothing hurt ye."

The children were reassured and became quiet in a moment.

"Got a match?" he whispered to Shorty. "I think the gas is on again."

"Yes."

"Quick—let me have it."

There was a snap, a flash and a tiny flame appeared.

The tramp was right; the gas had been turned on again.

Ginger, misunderstanding his master's directions, had turned the gas on in a few moments after turning it off.

But for the prompt action of the tramp a disaster might have occurred.

He hurriedly lighted the jets in the two parlors, saying to Shorty:

"Run up-stairs, Mr. George, and light up again, or you'll have the house full o' gas."

The Old Man had been left in the dark as well as the rest, for he had forgotten that all the pipes connected with one meter, or else never thought of it at all.

He had the fire-light, however, and that was sufficient to enable him to see.

When the children began to scream he became alarmed.

"My word! I never thought of them. I only meant to scare George and Charlie."

Then he started to go out, tripped over a footstool, and fell at full length.

When he finally got up and went into the hall everything was as light as it had been before.

"Guess I'd better not say anything about my little snap," he mused. "It wasn't as successful as I thought it was going to be."

All the burners were relighted, the children comforted, the fainting ones restored, and things set to going as lively as before the lights went out.

All hands danced, sang, romped, played games, and frolicked until ten o'clock, when it was decided to be high time that the kiddies were put to bed.

Both the Old Man and the tramp had taken off their costumes and washed their faces, and now, as the children were going away, they met in the library.

"Ahem! you are my friend of this morning?" said Josiah.

"Yes, Mr. Burwick, and I hope you'll excuse the liberty I took. Christmas has made a different man of me."

"Well, yes, you do look considerably more neat than you did this morning."

"The change has taken place in the inside as well as on the outside, Mr. Burwick. I've given up being an old tramp, and I'm going to work. Mr. George has promised to get me a job."

Well, the Christmas snaps came to an end, like everything else, and the Shorty household settled down to its usual routine, relieved occasionally by some prank of the boys, although they usually had their fun outside.

Shorty was as good as his word, and to-day the former tramp is an industrious, steady-going mechanic, sticking to business and drawing good pay, and remembering gratefully that all his good fortune has been the result and the outgrowth of the SHORTYS' CHRISTMAS SNAPS.

[THE END.]

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